

Research Utilisation in Policymaking: A Case Study of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of the Western Cape

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date: 8 November 2004

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between research and policymaking in South African higher education, using the Education Policy Unit at the University of the Western Cape (UWC-EPU) -recently renamed the Centre for the Study of Higher Education - as a case study. The study begins by examining the various models that explain the nature of policymaking in Western democracies, as well as the main theoretical frameworks – namely the “two communities” theory and the enlightenment model of knowledge utilisation - that explain the relationship between the production of knowledge and its utilisation in policymaking. It is argued that, although most of these models were developed to analyse the policymaking process within the context of mature democracies, they nonetheless raise important issues for developing countries like South Africa.

The study proceeds to provide an overview of the process of policy development in South Africa. It is suggested that a better way of understanding the evolution of higher education policy development in South Africa is to see it as having gone through four phases, each of which marks a significant turning point within higher education itself, as well as in the broader political context. The process of the policy development, and in particular the role of (higher education) research within it, is shown as one that was largely driven by political and ideological imperatives.

The study then shifts to a discussion of the CSHE, commencing with an overview of its organisational history, and highlighting the main objectives of its research programme and the changes that occurred with regard to its research orientation. These are examined in relation to external factors - for example the shift from the development of policy frameworks to the focus on implementation - and in terms of the dynamics that were internal to the University of the Western Cape. This discussion also highlights the

challenges that were faced by the EPU and other progressive academics in the early phases of the policy development process, namely that of engaging in a 'reconstructive' agenda on the one hand, while undertaking intellectual/scientific work on the other hand. In the case of the CSHE, there was also the added challenge of contributing to the development of the nascent field of higher education studies.

One of the key issues that emerge in the analysis of the interviews, which form the core source of data collection for this study, is the multifarious understanding of the way in which the research undertaken by the CSHE was to be utilised. The three notions of 'use' that are highlighted - which are also embedded in the objectives of the CSHE as set out in its constitution – are the following:

- Utilisation as generation of ideas, and particularly as a contribution to the debates on social reconstruction
- Utilisation as input into the policymaking process
- Utilisation as contribution to scholarship

The study shows that there is a mixed assessment of the extent to which the CSHE was able to address these competing – and sometimes contradictory – challenges. In the main, its efforts were hamstrung by a confluence of factors, ranging from its inability to recruit or attract experienced researchers, to the orientation of its research towards critique, something which was a feature of the scholarship emanating from the progressive academic community at the time.

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie tesis is om die verhouding tussen navorsing en beleidsvorming binne die konteks van die Suid- Afrikaanse hoër onderwysomgewing te ondersoek. Met die oog hierop word die Education Policy Unit aan die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland (UWC-EPU), onlangs herdoop tot die Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CHSE), deur middel van 'n gevallestudie beskryf. Die studie begin met 'n ondersoek na die verskillende modelle wat poog om die aard van beleidsvorming binne Westerse demokrasieë te verduidelik. Verder word die hoof teoretiese raamwerke, teweete die “two communities” teorie asook die “enlightenment model”, wat die verhouding tussen die skep van kennis en die aanwending daarvan binne 'n beleidskonteks wil verduidelik, ook ondersoek. Hoewel die meeste modelle van hierdie aard ontwikkel is om die proses van beleidsvorming binne volwasse demokrasieë te analiseer, word aangevoer dat hulle desnieteenstaande belangrike kwessies na vore bring vir ontwikkelende lande soos Suid-Afrika.

Die studie gaan verder deur 'n oorsig te gee oor die proses van beleidsontwikkeling in Suid- Afrika. Daar word gesuggereer dat 'n meer verantwoorde wyse om die evolusie van hoër onderwysbeleid in Suid-Afrika te verstaan, sou wees om erkenning te gee aan 'n vier-fase-benadering, waarvan elk 'n betekenisvolle rigtingverandering aangedui het, sowel as die invloed van die breër politieke konteks. Die proses van beleidsontwikkeling, en meer spesifiek die rol van (hoër onderwys) navorsing daarin, word aangetoon as synde hoofsaaklik gemotifeer deur politieke en ideologiese imperatiewe.

Hierna verskuif die fokus van die studie na 'n bespreking van die CSHE deur te begin met 'n oorsig oor die geskiedenis van die sentrum. Die hoof doelwitte van die sentrum se navorsingsprogram asook die veranderinge wat onlangs plaasgevind ten opsigte van navorsingsoriëntasie, word bespreek. Hierdie

aspekte word ondersoek aan die hand van eksterne faktore - byvoorbeeld die verskuiwing wat plaasgevind het vanaf die klem op ontwikkelingsraamwerke na 'n fokus op implimentering – en in terme van die dinamika wat eie is en was aan die Universiteit van Wes Kaapland. Die gesprek poog verder om lig te werp op die tipiese uitdagings waarmee Education Policy Units en navorsers in hierdie veld mee te doen gehad het in die beginjare van die beleidsontwikkelingsproses, naamlik om vanuit 'n rekonstruktiewe agenda te opereer en terselfertyd betrokke te wees met navorsing op 'n akademiese en wetenskaplike vlak. In die geval van die CSHE, het die verdere uitdaging om deurlopend bydraes tot die veld van hoër onderwysstudies te lewer, hoë eise aan die eenheid gestel.

'n Sleutelaspek wat na vore gekom het tydens die analise van die onderhoude (laasgenoemde vorm die sentrale bron van vir die data-versameling van die studie) is dat uiteenlopende interpretasies bestaan van hoe die navorsing soos deur die CSHE onderneem, benut behoort te word. Die drie perspektiewe op benutting ("use") wat uitgelig word, en wat 'n sentrale deel van die doelwitte van die CSHE uitmaak soos in die grondwet van die sentrum vervat, is die volgende:

- Benutting as die skep van idees, en in die besonder as 'n bydrae tot debatte oor sosiale rekonstruksie
- Benutting as inset tot die proses van beleidmaking
- Benutting as bydrae tot navorsing

Die studie toon aan dat die maniere waarop die CSHE in staat was om hierdie kompeterende, en soms teensprekende, uitdagings te hanteer, op uiteenlopende wyses geëvalueer was. In hoofsaak is die pogings van die sentrum aan bande gelê deur 'n sameloop van verskillende faktore wat gestrek het vanaf die probleem om ervare navorsers te lok en aan te stel tot met die probleem om sy navorsing aan te pas en te heroriënteer gegrond op kritiese stemme, dikwels die gevolg van die progressiewe akademiese gemeenskap van die tyd.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance provided by my supervisor, Prof Mouton, as well those who willingly gave of their time to be interviewed for this study. Their names are listed in the appendices.

Abbreviations

ANC:	African National Congress
CEPD:	Centre for Higher Education Policy Development
CHE:	Council on Higher Education
CHEPS:	Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies
CODESA:	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CSHE:	Centre for the Study of Higher Education
DoE:	Department of Education
EPU:	Education Policy Unit
GNU:	Government of National Unity
HE:	Higher Education
IPET:	Implementation Plan for Education and Training
NCHE:	National Commission on Higher Education
NECC:	National Education Co-ordination Committee
NEPI:	National Education Policy Investigation
NETF:	National Education and Training Forum
NGO:	Non-governmental Organisation
NPHE:	National Plan on Higher Education
NQF:	National Qualifications Framework
NWG:	National Working Group
RESA:	Research on Education in South Africa
RETPESA:	Research and Training Project on Education in South Africa
SAPSE:	South African Post Secondary Education
SAQA:	South African Qualifications Authority

SAUVCA: South African Vice Chancellors Association
TELP: Tertiary Education Linkages Project
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
UWC: University of the Western Cape

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 The Aim of the Research

The aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between research and policymaking in South African higher education, using the Education Policy Unit at the University of the Western Cape¹ (UWC-EPU) as a case study. Prior to the mid-1970's, when researchers in the United States began to conduct studies to interrogate the extent of the influence and/or impact of social research on policymaking, it had been taken for granted that what policymakers required to help them in their decision making - and which social research was best qualified to provide - was advice derived from reliable data, rigorous analysis, and well thought-out findings or research conclusions. In this regard, social research was seen as the *sine qua non* for the development of social interventions and policies that would be able to address the problems facing societies. It was only after the disappointing results of these studies, which showed a lack of correspondence between research and its use in policymaking, that the relationship between knowledge and its utilisation in policymaking became the focus of serious academic scrutiny.

In order to explore and examine some of the dynamics underlying the utilisation of research in higher education policymaking in South Africa, the study is guided by the following questions:

- What have been the objectives of the research programmes of the CSHE since its inception in 1992 to the present? To what extent have these changed over the years?
- To what extent has the CSHE succeeded in producing research that has been able to influence policymaking or shape the higher education policy discourse?

- Who have been the main beneficiaries of the research output of the CSHE's research programme? (How) has this changed over the years?
- What has facilitated or hindered the ability of the CSHE to get its research products or output utilised in policy development?

1.2 Background and Rationale

The process of policy development in South Africa provides the backdrop of the examination of the central questions of this study. There are numerous models that explain the nature of the policymaking process in Western democracies, and these are the subject of the extensive review of the literature in Chapter Three. Many of these models, and in particular those based on the rationalist model of policymaking, assume an instrumental relationship between research and policymaking. Indeed, the process of policy development in South Africa – when viewed as a whole from its inception *via* the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) initiative in 1990, up to the promulgation of the Higher Education Act in 1997 – shares many of the assumptions (regarding the relationship between research and policy) that underlie a rationalist policymaking process.

The first Education Policy Units (at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Natal) were established in the late 1980s by the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) to conduct research and training programmes in various areas of education, and were an important component of the NECC's strategy of "reconstructing education in the midst of struggle" (Samoff, 1995: 21). Later developments such as the NEPI exercise and the establishment of the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) in 1995 - which was set up as an education policy development arm of the African National Congress (ANC) - also ushered the EPUs towards research projects whose main objective was to contribute to policy development.

The CSHE was established in 1992 to conduct “high-level theoretical and empirical research on alternative education policies for a new democratic South Africa”, with higher education as the specialised area of study (UWC-EPU, 1991: 5). Indeed, the document that outlines the research and training of the CSHE argues that it was a particular conception of the role of research in policy formation – namely that the formulation of education policies “depends, in the first instance, on the availability of a body of relevant knowledge which can only be generated through the research process” (UWC-EPU, 1991: 7) – that prompted the initiative to establish the organisation at the University of the Western Cape. It is to the examination of the issues underlying this conception of the role of research in policy formation that is the subject of this study.

1.3 Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted for this study since it is primarily exploratory in that it seeks to broaden our understanding of an area that has not been the subject of empirical study in South Africa, and about which very little has been written. Further, a qualitative research design was deemed to be the most appropriate for this study since the main objective of such studies is to understand phenomena – in this case, the utilisation of research in higher education policy development – in relation to their social setting and context. In other words, the purpose is to seek a better understanding of this phenomenon within the specificities of the South African context, rather than to develop a set of propositions that would be generalisable to all situations.

The study used a single-case design as the CSHE was for a long period the only (university-based) centre dedicated to the production of research that was geared towards contributing to higher education policy development. In addition, as the study is exploratory, the use of a single-case design is intended as a prelude to further studies that will examine these issues in much more depth.

Another reason for the adoption of a qualitative research design is that it allows for a more flexible approach to the collection of data, which enables the researcher to adjust the ongoing data collection methods and modes of analysis in order to respond quickly to context specific constraints. In this regard, the main sources for the data that was used in this thesis were interviews that were conducted with key informants associated with the CSHE, and with officials from the Department of Education (DoE). Other source material was obtained from primary data in the form of higher education legislation, higher education policy documents and reports that have been produced by the DoE as well as the CSHE. Secondary data in the form of research reports, articles from refereed journals, books, and conference papers, was also used extensively.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The thesis is organised under seven chapter headings. Chapter Two provides an overview of the research design and methodology that was used to undertake the study. Thereafter, Chapter Three reviews the literature on the various aspects of the relationship between research and its utilisation in policymaking. This discussion is divided into four sections: the first section examines the nature of social research, and gives an account of the various understandings of the uses and purposes of research in the social sciences.

This is followed by a section that provides an extensive overview of the models of the policymaking process, with a focus on the rational and political models. The discussion in this section shows that all these models, although differing with respect to the stage of the policymaking process that they regard as critical, nonetheless privilege the role played by elected public officials (policy elites) in the formal process of public policy development. The rest of the discussion in this chapter then focuses on the literature that examines the relationship between research and policymaking, both in terms of the conceptual frameworks that are prominent within this literature, as well as some of the key debates within the literature on higher education research.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the policy development process in South Africa. This is done through the 'periodisation' of the history of policy development into four phases which coincide with some of the defining moments in the evolution of the post-apartheid dispensation in higher education. Using these four phases as a backdrop to the discussion, the chapter then charts some of the challenges that were faced by research groups such as the EPU in their attempts to meet the twin challenges of contributing to post-apartheid reconstruction on the one hand, whilst also playing an activist role in de-legitimatising the ideological foundations of apartheid education.

The chapter (Chapter Five) that follows gives a descriptive overview of the history of the CSHE, highlighting the main objectives of its research programme and the changes that occurred with regard to its research orientation. These are examined in relation to external factors, for example the shift from the development of policy frameworks to the focus on implementation, as well as dynamics that were internal to the University of the Western Cape.

Chapter Six provides an analysis of the dynamics of knowledge utilisation as these pertain to the experience and history of the CSHE. This chapter also examines the various notions of knowledge utilisation as these apply to the work undertaken by the CSHE, and makes an assessment – on the basis of the analyses of the interviews – of the extent to which the CSHE managed to get its research 'used' either in policymaking, in higher education as a field of study, or within the realm of ideas.

The concluding chapter highlights the key issues that have emerged from the study, as well as its main limitations, and suggests some key pointers for further research.

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- ¹ The Education Policy Unit at the University of the Western Cape (UWC-EPU) was renamed the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) in 2002. For the purposes of this thesis we shall use the latter designation.

Chapter Two

Research Design and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore some of the issues that relate to the question of knowledge utilisation in higher education policymaking in South Africa. This will be done through an examination of the role that the Education Policy Unit at University of the Western Cape (UWC-EPU) has played in higher education policy development processes since its inception in the early 1990s.

Although the models and theories that explore the relationship between the production of knowledge and its utilisation in policymaking will provide the backdrop to the study, the thesis will approach these issues – at least insofar as they pertain to the South African context - in a fairly open-ended manner. In other words, although these various models and theoretical frameworks – which are the subject of the discussion in the chapter that follows - will inform our examination of issues as they pertain to the utilisation of research in policymaking, we will not be ‘imposing’ any particular framework or model, *a priori* as it were, as the most appropriate for explaining the issue under investigation.

2.2 Research Questions

In order to explore and examine some of the dynamics underlying the utilisation of research in higher education policymaking in South Africa, the study was guided by the following questions:

- What have been the objectives of the research programmes of the CSHE since its inception in 1992 to the present? To what extent have these changed over the years?

- To what extent has the CSHE succeeded in producing research that has been able to influence policymaking or shape the higher education policy discourse?
- Who have been the main beneficiaries of the research output of the CSHE's research programme? (How) has this changed over the years?
- What has facilitated or hindered the ability of the CSHE to get its research products or output utilised in policy development?

Although these questions guided the overall study, the interview protocols that contained the detailed questions differed in their emphases depending on the role and position that the informant that was being interviewed occupied in the higher education policy landscape.

2.3 The Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted for this study since the main objective of such studies is to understand phenomena – in this case, the utilisation of knowledge in higher education policymaking – in relation to their setting and context. In other words, the purpose is to seek a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation within the specificities of the South African context - in the absence of primary research that has been undertaken in this area – rather than to develop a set of propositions that would be generalisable to all situations.

Qualitative research is regarded as the most appropriate research design for this study as it is exploratory in its broader objective, and also because its emphasis is on building (inductively) towards an explanation or understanding that is based on analyses and interpretations of first-order descriptions of events and phenomena (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001: 80), exploratory studies are undertaken to:

- satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding of the area under consideration
- explicate the central concepts and constructs of a study
- develop new hypotheses about an existing phenomenon
- test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study
- develop and refine the methods to be utilised in subsequent studies

The other reasons why a qualitative research design has been adopted for this study are that the:

- research is undertaken in its 'natural setting', and the empirical data collected are derived from the participants' experiences within, and the researcher's interpretations of, that 'natural setting'
- research design is flexible, allowing the researcher to adjust the ongoing data collection methods and modes of analysis in order to be able to respond to context-specific constraints
- phenomena under investigation centre on the insights, interpretations, in other words the 'sense making' (Scott, 1995), of the informants

(adapted from Lee, 1999: 27)

2.4 Research Methods

This section outlines the methods and procedures that were used to execute the research design. It specifically describes the methods of data collection that were used, the identification of the case, and the selection of informants for the study.

One of the strengths of case study design is its suitability to the use of multiple sources of evidence, for example interviews, artefacts, documents and observations, which help the researcher to form a complex picture of the

phenomena under investigation, while allowing for diverse and often competing explanations to be interrogated (Stake, 1995). Case studies are also useful when one wants to gain a better understanding of the “how and why” research questions (Yin, 1994), and when a richer description and explanation of a phenomenon is required, rather than predictions based upon cause and effect.

This study was a single-case design largely because the CSHE has, for a long time, been the only university-based research centre that has been working in the area of higher education policy research, and one of whose founding objectives was to conduct research in order to contribute to the policymaking process in particular, and the transformation of the South African higher education system in general.

2.4.1 Data Collection

The main sources of data collection that were used in this study were interviews as well as documentary materials.

Interviews

The interview provides an opportunity to gather data in the respondent's own words, thus making it possible for the researcher to focus the enquiry more pointedly towards the central questions driving the study. It also enables the researcher to seek information from the people who are directly involved with the issues under investigation, and who are also most familiar with the setting.

The process that was undertaken to design the interviewing process is almost identical, albeit with a few exceptions, to Kvale's (1996) seven-stage structure, although it was developed independently of this structure. Kvale's approach has the following components:

- *Thematising*: clarifying the purpose of the interview and the concepts to be explored
- *Designing*: outlining the process through which the goals of the interview will be accomplished
- *Interviewing*: undertaking the actual interviews
- *Transcribing*: transforming the interview material into written text (interview transcripts and logs)
- *Analysing*: making sense of the gathered material by relating it to the purpose of the study
- *Verifying*: checking the reliability and the validity of the materials
- *Reporting*: telling others what has been learnt

(from Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 290)

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 28) have also developed a categorisation of interviews according to:

- *Their degree of structure*: from focused/highly structured to unfocused/loosely structured
- *Their degree of overtness*: disclosing in advance the purpose of the interview or study, and how the informants' contribution will be used
- *Their level of trust and rapport*: the quality of the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent

If we were to locate the study's interview design in relation to Lincoln and Guba's first criterion (degree of structure), then our interview format leans towards the category of a loosely-structured design, where there is an identified overarching topic, general themes explored, more specific issues and questions targeted, and a pre-determined sequence for their occurrence followed (see Appendix 1a & 1b). Although there were issues and specific questions targeted for discussion, and a pre-determined sequence to their

occurrence, the semi-structured nature of the interview format provided space for the interviewer to freely pursue emerging topics and themes, and to probe more deeply than the questions might have initially anticipated (Lee, 1999). The objective of the semi-structured interview, therefore, was to strike a balance between a free flowing, and a directed, conversation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

With regard to the remaining two of Lincoln and Guba's criteria: the interview design had a high degree of overtness as the informants were informed in advance of the purpose of the interview and how their information would be used. There was also a very good rapport and a high-level of trust between the interviewer and the respondents. The main reason for this was that the researcher has had extensive experience in the higher education sector, and also had a professional association with many of the informants that were interviewed.

There were altogether nine informants who were interviewed (see Appendix 2); they included the current and former Directors of the CSHE, a former researcher at the CSHE who conducted one of the studies that were undertaken for the Department of Education, a member of the management committee of the CSHE, as well as four senior officials from the Department of Education.

2.4.2 Primary and Secondary Material

In addition to the interviews that were conducted, there was extensive analysis of primary data in the form of the various documents that the CSHE has produced over the years, including funding proposals and reports, evaluation reports, annual reports, conference proceedings, and occasional papers. Other primary materials were the higher education legislation and other higher education policy documents and reports that have been produced by the Department of Education. The secondary research material

consisted of unpublished research reports from the CSHE, as well as published journal articles and books. There was also extensive use of the international literature on the nature of the policy process, the utilisation of knowledge in policymaking, as well as higher education specific literature related to the dissertation topic.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is at the heart of qualitative studies. It is the process through which the data collected begins to take shape, form a story, outline patterns and trends, and make sense of the issues under investigation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In case study research, the final product begins to unfold as the patterns emerge from the analysis of the case under study, notwithstanding the limited advance knowledge the researcher has with regard to what the important dimensions will be (Patton, 1990).

Case studies explain two types of data: facts or questions of what happened; and the concepts and theories which organize and explain these facts (Pettigrew, 1995). Case studies attempt to go beyond the cataloguing of the facts to find the meanings attached to those facts by the informants.

Two sets of materials were analyzed for this study: interview logs from the interviews as well as the primary and secondary materials. Interview logs were created by the researcher from notes taken during interviews, and in the analysis of the interview transcriptions. They were used as a register of important statements and ideas that emerged during the analysis of the transcriptions.

From the analysis of the collected data a draft case study report was developed, which included all of the relevant material collected from the interviews and the primary materials. Developing the case-study report

included a four step process: first, creating a working outline immediately following the visit based on information from the interviews; second, reading each of the interview logs, noting where items and statements either fitted into the original outline, expanded the outline, or differed from it; third, upon re-reading each interview log, placing text into the outline or making modifications to the outline based upon the presented evidence, and doing the same for each log; and finally, going through a similar process for all of the other collected materials.

2.6 Methodological Rigour

Yin (1994) identifies the following three principles as central to establishing an ample level of methodological rigor in case study research: 1) the use of multiple sources of evidence; 2) the construction of a data base of information or case report specifically for the case study; and 3) the development of a logical chain of evidence describing the rationale and the processes used that connects the findings to the collected data.

This study adhered to these three principles through the following mechanisms: the study satisfied the requirement of multiple sources of evidence in two ways. First, the interview data was collected from a range of informants who were involved with the policymaking process in various ways. Second, in addition to using multiple informants, the study also obtained information from written material – both primary and secondary - as an alternative source of evidence. Multiple sources of evidence helped the researcher to develop “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 1994, p. 92), thus increasing the rigour of the analysis and making the study more convincing to the reader. Secondly, as outlined in the previous section, a data-base in the form of the interview logs was constructed specifically for the study, from which a logical chain of evidence was developed during the analysis stage.

An appropriate level of 'referential adequacy' (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) of the data was also maintained through the audio recording of all the interviews and the thorough checking of the interview transcriptions by a third person.

2.7 Limitations of the Study

An inherent limitation of the study arises from the fact that it is exploratory in nature, and intended to provide some tentative pointers to issues that are not very well understood, in an area where very little research – at least in South Africa – has previously been undertaken.

Another limitation of the study was the lack of detailed information on the research projects undertaken by the CSHE for the Department of Education. The Director of the CSHE was reluctant to discuss the specifics of the research commissions that were undertaken for the Department of Education for fear of (potentially) jeopardising what seemed to be an already strained relationship. The researcher also had difficulty in obtaining records of meetings, correspondence, and progress reports that were related to these projects, except for the final research reports that were submitted to the Department.

The study would also have benefited from interviews with policymakers in the National Assembly, and in particular the members of the Portfolio Committee in Education, which played a key role in the early stages of policy development in higher education. Unfortunately the researcher's attempts to get hold of the members of the National Assembly who served in the first democratic Parliament were not successful.

Chapter Three

Exploring the Utilisation of Research in Policymaking: A Review of the Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature on research utilisation in policymaking. It starts off by briefly discussing the nature of social and policy research, which serves as a primer to a more detailed discussion of models of the policymaking process. The chapter then proceeds to examine the relationship between research and policymaking. This discussion is in two parts, the first deals with the literature that looks at research and policymaking in general, and the second examines this relationship as it pertains to the higher education context.

3.2 The Nature of (Social) Research

A useful starting point when discussing research utilisation is to examine the different meanings of research that emerged from the literature. Such a discussion is important because a particular understanding of what constitutes research reveals certain assumptions about the relationship between research and the policymaking process. Our discussion of the different meanings of research in this chapter is not in reference to the familiar distinction that is usually made between 'basic' and 'applied' research.

A different way of differentiating between various meanings or 'images' of research is provided by Weiss (1991), who distinguishes between research as data, research as ideas, and research as argument. According to Weiss (1991), underlying the image of research as data is a technocratic view of the policy process, which assumes a value-free and conflict-free policy environment. In this scenario, there is compatibility between the data that the researcher provides, and the needs of the user who receives it. In other

words, the task of social research is to produce data or 'facts' whose use by policymakers is taken for granted. Weiss (1991: 3) states that research as data is more likely to be influential in situations where:

- there is consensus on values and goals
- there is little known about a current situation, especially in the context of a rapid transition
- decision-makers or their advisors are analytically sophisticated and can use the data generated by research to inform their decision-support systems

The image of research as ideas offers a less mechanistic relationship, or direct correspondence, between problem definition at the research end of the continuum and the solutions that are proposed in the policymaking domain. In other words, the researcher's formulation of the problem is not necessarily in response to the needs as expressed by policymakers. Weiss (1991) sees the notion of research as ideas as being influential under conditions of system failure or crisis, and in particular when existing policy is in disarray and uncertainty is high. She also sees it as being influential during the early stages of policy discussions, when various options are being explored, and there is latitude for considering different points of view. A parallel in the South African context would be the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) process, and the early stages of the National Commission on Higher Education, where ideas were being thrown around for consideration and exploration.

Finally, the notion of research as argumentation presupposes adversarial decision-making, and is to be found in situations where conflict is high, and where different sides are staking out their (policy) positions, and are using research to strengthen or buttress their perspectives. In some instances, research is used as a tactic to justify, or provide legitimation for, decisions that have already been made. This usage of research is typically found in

legislative fora, since a legislature is the “quintessential site for the resolution of ideological and interest-based differences” (Weiss, 1991: 3).

This discussion on the different notions of research provides a useful springboard to examine the different models of the policy process.

3.3 Models of the Policymaking Process

Since the overall aim of the dissertation is to examine the relationship between the production of knowledge and its utilisation in policy development, it is apposite for us to look at the different models that explain the nature of policymaking. It is also important because the different conceptualisations of, and assumptions about, the policy process that underlie these models also reveal particular understandings about the role of research in policy development.

The various models of policymaking that are found in the literature fall into two broad frameworks, namely the rationalist and the political perspectives. The rationalist models take as their starting point the notion that new knowledge or research can directly influence, or result in, policy change. The rationalist perspectives - which include the linear, the incrementalist and the interactive models to policymaking - regard policymaking as being constituted by a logical sequence of phases, which begin with the identification of a (policy) problem and end in its resolution through the use of research results (Grindle & Thomas, 1991; Nielson, 2001).

On the other hand, the models that fall under the political frame start from the assumption that various actors, many of whom are external to the policy process itself, play a key role in defining the questions and issues for research. Further, these models also place emphasis on (external) factors as playing a role in determining the likely influence that research will have on the

outcomes of the policymaking process. We will now briefly discuss some of the models that constitute each of these perspectives.

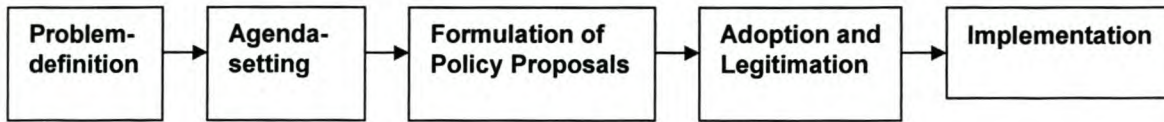
3.3.1 Rational Models of the Policy Process

The rational models have their origin in classical economic theory, in which an actor is presumed to be able to establish priorities among various available or competing alternatives on the basis of an assessment of the full information at his or her disposal (Grindle & Thomas, 1991; Scott, 1995). Following classical economic theory, these models have established a set of assumptions and conditions under which policymakers, on the basis of a rational assessment of the options and strategies available to them, reach their decisions. The models – also referred to as rational-actor theories - thus place a premium on the actions and perspectives of decision makers in determining policy choices (Grindle & Thomas, 1991). The discussion that follows will focus on three of the most prominent models to be found in the literature that fall under the rationalist framework, namely the linear, the incrementalist, and the interactive models of the policy process.

The Linear Model

The linear model has been derived from the early work of Harold Lasswell and is regarded as the traditional or 'textbook' approach to the policymaking process (Porter & Hicks, 1995). This model, which splits the policymaking process into its component steps, has been variously referred to as the stages, the engineering (Bulmer, 1982), or the rational comprehensive model (Porter & Hicks, 1995). Although the sequence of steps as identified by Bulmer (1982) and Porter & Hicks (1995) are slightly different, with the Bulmer version having one less step than Porter & Hicks', there is considerable overlap between them in that they both begin with an identification of the problem, followed by a series of rational interventions that seek to address the problem, and culminating in the implementation of the solution(s). These steps can be represented as follows:

Figure 1: The Linear Model of policymaking



Adapted from Bulmer, 1982; Porter & Hicks, 1995

Implicit in the linear approach to policymaking is the assumption that there is a common understanding among policy-makers and researchers of what the desired end-state of the process should be (Bulmer, 1982). The role of social research, which becomes prominent especially in the 'Formulation of Policy Proposals' stage of the process, is to help identify the choices available, and to select the appropriate means for reaching the desired policy goals. If we were to link this discussion to the one in the preceding section on the different forms or 'images' of research, it is clear that the role of the social researcher in this model is that of a 'technician' who provides value-free, empirical, data, which is then deployed to solve the problem.

There have been various criticisms levelled at the linear model of policymaking. It has been criticised for not adequately capturing the dynamic nature of the policymaking process, in particular in failing to take account of the complexity of decision-making in policy development. By exaggerating the role of the decision-maker for whom research is carried out, and giving "unwarranted authority" (Bulmer, 1982: 45) to the input that the social researcher provides, the linear model has tended to downplay the usually messy, confused, and very unpredictable nature of policymaking.

Similarly, Porter & Hicks (1995) criticise the model for 'front-loading' or privileging the role and function of research in policy development instead of seeing it as one of a number of inputs into the policymaking chain. In other words, there is a tendency within this perspective to put more emphasis on the policy formulation stage of the process, at the expense of a closer

examination of what happens in subsequent phases, in particular the policy implementation stage. In this regard, the model takes 'policy' as what ends up in policy texts such as government legislation, and ignores a closer scrutiny of what is actually implemented or practised 'on the ground'. As a consequence, it misses some of the ways in which policy intentions that are contained in these texts get undermined or subverted in the process of implementation, to an extent where what gets practised at the coal face of say, the classroom, bears little resemblance to what is contained in policy documents.

Despite these criticisms, Porter & Hicks (1995: 5) highlight a number of conceptual strengths that the linear model possesses. The most important is that it provides a heuristic tool for disaggregating the policy process into discreet steps that can be systematically examined and analysed, and in which different tactics for shaping policy come into play. Even in the case of South Africa, where the policy process in an area such as education – and especially in the period leading up to the first democratic elections in 1994 – was highly politicised, haphazard, and somewhat messy, one can still associate each of the steps in the diagram above with a particular phase of the process that unfolded in the course of the country's policymaking process.¹

Another strength that Porter & Hicks (1995) identify in this model is that, by shifting attention away from a preoccupation with an institution-based approach to the study of the policy process – which usually puts emphasis on the role of formal institutions such as the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature – the linear model brings into sharp relief the various elements or stages of the policymaking process.

There have been attempts to modify the linear model in order to deal with some of the shortcomings that have been highlighted above. We will now turn to a discussion of two other models of the policy process that also fall within

the rationalist perspectives, and which attempt to address some of the criticisms that have been levelled at the linear model.

The Incremental Model

The incremental model puts its spotlight on the decision-making phase of the policy process, presenting it as one that is somewhat more tentative than the linear model seeks to convey; policymakers within this model - rather than being decisive decision-makers - are seen to make gradual, if not modest, adjustments to changes in policy. A modification that is introduced to the rational actor assumption of the linear model is to see policymaking as being constituted of incremental or marginal changes over time, as decision-makers seek to reduce the uncertainty, conflict, and complexities that confront them (Grindle & Thomas, 1991). It is probably for this reason that Lindblom has described policymaking as a process of “disjointed incrementalism and muddling through” (quoted in Nielson, 2001: 16).

A number of criticisms have also been levelled at this model, the primary of which is that, not unlike the linear model, it does not adequately reflect the nature of the policy process. In this case, the main criticism is that the model is essentially remedial - as opposed to being transformational - since it emphasises a gradualist approach to policy change, rather than “dramatic and fundamental” transformation (Sutton, 1999, quoted in Nielson, 2001: 17). This position has had support from authors such as Grindle and Thomas (1991) and Dror (1997, cited in Nielson, 2001), who contend that the incremental model is of little relevance to developing countries since, more often than not, such societies experience big and fundamental change, rather than piecemeal reform.

My own rebuttal of Grindle & Thomas' critique is not so much in relation to the utility of incrementalism in explaining the policy process *per se*, but more with the authors' understanding of the nature of policy reform in developing countries. For example, if one looks at the South African case, it is clear that,

at the level of the policy reform initiatives of the government, there is an abundance of policies and programmes whose objective is to bring about the fundamental transformation of society; this is the case with respect to policy interventions in areas such as land reform, social security reform, housing, etc. However, if one looks at how these programmes have been implemented, one sees that they invariably adopt 'reformist' or 'gradualist' agendas. Of course, there are a number of explanations for this phenomenon. Stone (2001, quoted in Nielson, 2001: 17) is partially correct in pointing out that this has to do with

pragmatism in policy-making [which] tends towards the avoidance of costly innovation or departures from routine practice, and ...[leans towards] the marginal alteration of existing policies or reactive policies to problems that have already arisen.

Another explanation is that these hitherto 'revolutionary' programmes come up against the constraints imposed by the global political economy within which developing countries operate, where the sentiments of investors and lending agencies – who take a dim view of such radical interventions – hold sway.

The Interactive Model

This model, which originates from the work of Grindle & Thomas (1991), puts emphasis on the implementation stage of the policy process. The point of departure of the interactive model – which should not be confused with Weiss' (1991) interactive model of research utilisation that will be discussed later in this chapter – is guided by the following concern: why are some implementation efforts successful and others not?

For these authors, implementation is seen as the most important stage of the policy process, especially in the context of developing countries, where "historical, economic, and political conditions set a common context within which decisions must be made and carried out" (Grindle & Thomas, 1991:

13). The difference between this model and the two previous rationalist models is that it introduces indeterminacy as a feature of policy implementation:

implementation is often the most crucial aspect of the policy process and the outcomes of implementation efforts are highly variable, ranging from successful to unsuccessful, but including also an almost limitless number of other potential outcomes

(Grindle and Thomas, 1990, quoted in Nielson, 2001:18)

Although the interactive model introduces the notion of politics into the policy process, it remains firmly within the framework of the rationalist perspective since it gives prominence to the actions of policy elites, who are internal to the policy process. Our next set of models focus on the role of politics and external actors in policymaking.

3.3.2 *Political Models of the Policy Process*

As the name suggests, the models falling under the political frame take as their point of departure the assumption that policymaking is a highly political sphere of activity, where networks, coalitions, and other interest formations adopt various strategies to try and influence the process to their advantage. What distinguishes these models from the ones we discussed under the rationalist framework is not only their introduction of politics into the policy-making equation, but also their emphasis on policy *change*, rather than just policy *making*. In other words, more than being interested in how policies get adopted and/or implemented, they interrogate the (political) dynamics that are involved in bringing about changes to policies. The literature has distinguished between three such models, namely the policy network, the policy transfer, and the agenda-setting (or multiple streams) models (Grindle & Thomas, 1991; Nielson, 2001; Porter & Hicks, 1995). We will discuss each of these in turn.

Policy Network Model

The policy network model is derived from pluralist approaches to policymaking, whose point of departure is that public policy is an outcome of a dynamic process that is characterised by conflict, bargaining, lobbying, and coalition formation among a potentially large number of societal groups, who are organized to protect or advance the particular interests that are common to their members. This model regards policy change as a function of the diversity of actors and interest groups found within political systems. As Reimers and McGinn (1997) put it:

policy change is the result of a process of negotiating competing interests within the education [system] and with the external environment where the system operates...

(quoted in Nielson, 2001: 20)

We will now turn to a brief discussion of each of the various 'collectivities' which, within the pluralist framework, are seen to constitute an influential element of the policymaking process.

Issue Networks

Issue networks are associated with the work of Hugh Heclo (1978), who defines an issue network as a:

shared-knowledge group...[that is] likely to have a common base of information and understanding of how one *knows* (my emphasis) about policy and identifies its problems

(Heclo, 1978; quoted in Nielson, 2001: 21)

For Heclo, issue networks tend to have a large number of participants who move in and out of these networks constantly, and whose commitment to the issue concerned varies considerably; indeed, "it is almost impossible to say where a network leaves off and its environment begins" (Heclo, 1978; quoted in Nielson, 2001: 21). According to Heclo (cited in Nielson, 2001), what brings

or keeps an issue network together is not a consensus over a policy issue or shared beliefs, but a common understanding or knowledge of the issue. Heclo argues that although

[p]articular professions may be prominent [within the network], the true experts in the networks are those who are issue-skilled (that is, well-informed about the ins and outs of a particular policy debate) ...network people are activists who know each other through the issues

(quoted in Nielson, 2001: 21)

Issue networks are therefore not a stable collective, displaying very weak 'self-binding' behaviour. Stone (1996) states that issue networks may even consist of "participants with conflicting interests, a lack of common values, and little consensus regarding problem definition, or the outcomes of policy interventions" (quoted in Nielson, 2001: 21). Although the literature does not provide examples of issue networks, the only such grouping that I could think of that seems to share similar characteristics is the anti-globalisation movement, or issue-based coalitions such as the (Iraq) Anti-War Coalition.

Epistemic Communities

An Epistemic community is defined by Haas (1992) as a

network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain, and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that particular domain or issue area

(quoted in Nielson, 2001: 21)

While the professionals constituting a particular epistemic community may not be from a particular profession or discipline, they have the following in common:

- A shared set of normative and principled beliefs
- Shared causal beliefs

- Shared notions of validity
- A common policy enterprise

(Haas, 1992, cited in Nielson, 2001: 21)

According to Stone (1996), epistemic communities derive their influence (on the policy process) from the collective expertise that is at their disposal, and from how “expert forms of advice penetrate bureaucracies and influence decision-makers” (quoted in Nielson, 2001: 22).

However, I think that the possession or monopoly of expertise by epistemic communities does not constitute a sufficient condition for their having an influence on decision makers. I would rather argue that theirs is a latent influence, which requires the presence of other factors or conditions for it to be realised. In other words, the utility of the influence or power that an epistemic community possesses depends on the extent to which a relationship, and/or organic linkage, exists between members of the epistemic community and the policy elites.

Such an organic linkage could be a shared value-framework or a set of normative beliefs, which would ‘facilitate’ the policy elite’s responsiveness to the epistemic community’s overtures. Another possible condition could be the dearth of policy expertise within the bureaucracy itself, or - as was the case in a transitional society like South Africa - a scenario where the inherited bureaucracy does not enjoy the trust and/or confidence of the new policy elites, who are then compelled to rely on the epistemic community as an alternative source for ideas and (policy) expertise. Of course, this also presupposes a semblance of ideological, or value-compatibility between the epistemic community and the policy elites.

Policy Communities

Unlike epistemic communities, who coalesce around their disciplinary or professional expertise and adhere to common belief systems and the truth claims of their expert knowledge, policy communities do not share such principled beliefs (Stone, 1996). Instead, they share a common understanding of a particular policy domain, and are more integrated to policymaking institutions than the first two groups above. Policy communities are defined as

stable networks of policy actors from both inside and outside government,
[who] are integrated with the policy-making process

(Stone et al, 2001, quoted in Nielson, 2001: 23).

For Kingdon (1984), policy communities also consist of a specialised sub-grouping, which he refers to as 'policy entrepreneurs' - whose defining characteristic

is their willingness to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money – in the hope of a future return. That return might come to them in the form of policies of which they approve, satisfaction from participation, or even personal aggrandizement in the form of job security or career promotion

Kingdon (1984: 129)

Although characterised as a stable network by Stone *et al* (2001), the policy community does not seem to have the features of a cohesive collective. Except for having a common understanding of a particular policy domain, there doesn't seem to be much that members share to sustain 'in-group' cohesion, unlike advocacy coalitions, which we now turn to.

Advocacy Coalition

Advocacy coalitions are associated with the work of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993; 1994; 1999), and emerged from their work on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The ACF seeks to develop an understanding of the process of policy change by synthesising the best features of both 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches in relation to the implementation stage of the policy process (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994). Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier (1994: 186) define an advocacy coalition as consisting of

actors from a variety of governmental and private organisations [who are at] different levels [in their organisations, and] who share a set of policy beliefs and seek to realize them by influencing the behaviour of multiple governmental institutions over time

These actors are driven by a set of policy-oriented goals that comprise of "value priorities" – for example the relative importance of environmental protection vs. economic development - and conceptions "of whose welfare should be of greatest concern" (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999: 130). Thus the key difference between a policy community and an advocacy coalition is that in the latter, actors are not driven merely by a shared understanding of a policy area, but by "core belief systems", which provide the glue for 'in-group' cohesion (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994: 182). Further, the goal of the coalition is to translate their beliefs into policy change objectives and, at any particular point in time, a coalition will adopt a strategy or strategies to attempt to alter the behaviour of one or more governmental institutions in order to make them more consistent with the coalition's own policy objectives.

As a conclusion to this section of the discussion, we need to ask: how effective have the various permutations of networks been in influencing policy? It seems that, although the mobilisation of resources and intellectual capital may greatly enhance the opportunity for networks, communities or coalitions to influence policy, research from a study by Reimers & McGinn (1997) suggests that networks of various kinds are more effective as sources

of knowledge and information-sharing than having any direct impact in policymaking.

Finally, my difficulty with some of this literature on policy network models is the conceptual slippage that occurs with regard to the usage of terms such as 'networks', 'communities' and 'coalitions'. For example, in relation to the discussion on policy communities, it is not entirely clear what the 'glue' is that keeps a policy community together, besides a shared concern for a particular policy problem. This is especially the case since its membership is drawn from inside and outside of government, and may be scattered in terms of its institutional and professional affiliations. In other words, what makes them a 'community' and not a 'network' is not clear, if one's (commonsense) understanding of the former concept is of a deeper bond – what Kooimans (1993) refers to as 'self-binding' behaviour - between members than in the latter.

Policy Transfer Model

The policy transfer model has developed over time from different fields, such as comparative politics and diffusion studies, as well as ideas from the concept of 'lesson-drawing' that has been advanced by Rose (1991, cited in Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). Policy transfer, emulation, and lesson-drawing all refer to:

a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place

(Dolowitz & Marsh: 1996: 344)

Dolowitz & Marsh (1996) distinguish between three forms of policy transfer, namely voluntary transfer, 'direct coercive' transfer, and 'indirect-coercive' transfer. The primary catalyst for voluntary policy transfer is dissatisfaction, or

a problem with the status quo, which usually arises out of a widespread perception of policy failure. Coercive policy transfer occurs when one government forces another to adopt its policies. Although this form of policy transfer is rare, one example would be when a donor country puts pressure on a developing country to adopt structural adjustment programmes or policies as a condition for receiving aid. The third form of policy transfer, the indirect coercive transfer, is usually an off-shoot of functional interdependence, for example in a situation where countries adopt similar environmental regulatory frameworks because of their geographic proximity.

The objects of the policy transfer process, or what gets transferred, can be any one of the following:

- the goals and objectives of policy interventions
- the substance and content of the policies themselves;
- policy instruments or administrative techniques
- institutions
- ideologies, ideas, attitudes and concepts, and
- negative lessons

(Dolowitz & Marsh 1996: 350)

Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) also identify six agents or actors in policy transfer processes, and these are: elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs/experts, and supranational institutions. The policy entrepreneurs or expert groups can be individual experts, think tanks, or consulting organisations, or a combination of the 'collectivities' that we discussed in the previous section. The policy transfer literature has been criticised for its "inherent bias" in putting much of its emphasis on intra-developed world, and North-South policy transfer, without much consideration of South-South, or even South-North policy transfer (Nedley, 2000: 30).

The Multiple Streams Model

The third model falling under the political or pluralist approaches to policymaking is the multiple streams model, which has been derived from organisational theory, and in particular from the work of Cohen and March (1974) on the 'garbage-can' model of decision-making. In this model, decision-making is seen as being akin to a garbage-can into which problems and preconceived solutions are dumped and jostled around until a solution emerges. Most decisions are not made,

but actually 'happen', often as a by-product of non-action, or of 'action' that is unintended

(Baldridge, 1983: 44)

Kingdon (1984) has drawn from the 'garbage-can' model to conceptualise and explain policy change by separating the process of policymaking into three distinct spheres or streams, namely that of problems, policies or solutions, and politics. Kingdon's (1984: 92) basic premise is that it is through the interaction of these "three families of processes" or streams that the policy agenda of political systems is shaped. Each of these streams has processes which work independently of the other two, so that:

- Problems are defined according to processes that are different from the ways in which policies are formulated and political events unfold
- Policy alternatives are formulated according to their own criteria of selection, whether or not they offer solutions to recognized problems, or are sensitive to political considerations
- Political events flow along on their own, often unpredictable, schedule, whether or not they are related to problems or policies being proposed

(Porter & Hicks, 1995: 11)

The Problem Stream

The problem stream encompasses the ways in which social conditions come to be defined as problems and brought to the attention of policymakers, their advisors and/or bureaucrats. Generally, this is accomplished through indicants such as disasters and crises, through the strategic use of images and symbols, and by feedback from the operation of current programs. For Kingdon (1984) however, not every social condition qualifies as a problem. In order for a social condition to become a problem, “people must be convinced that something should be done to change it” (Kingdon, 1984: 119). In other words, there has to be a process of translating the conditions people are experiencing into social or policy problems. This normally occurs through activities such as lobbying and campaigning, activities in which social research also plays a role.

The Policy Stream

The policy stream encompasses the realm of the generation of solutions. This is the arena where policy communities, networks and coalitions develop ideas and frame policy proposals and solutions, primarily through research. Policymakers turn to these communities and networks for policy alternatives that may be relevant to their concerns and interests, and that might constitute solutions to the problems they have identified as significant. However, in order for these solutions to be placed on the policy agenda, they have to pass what Kingdon (1984: 138) refers to as the “survival criteria” of the political stream, namely “technical feasibility” and “value acceptability”. In other words, the proposals have to fulfil, sometimes simultaneously, the criteria of scientific or technical rigour, whilst also being compatible with the value-framework of the dominant forces within government.

The Political Stream

The third ‘family of processes’ that determines whether a social problem becomes part of the government’s policy agenda is the political stream. Kingdon (1984) points to three factors that can influence which policy

proposals or problems are put on the policy agenda; these are the 'national mood', the balance of political interests, and political events such as a change in government. Developments in the political stream occur independently of either the policy proposal formulation or the problem definition processes discussed above. As Porter & Hicks put it (1995: 10):

decisions [in the political stream] result more from an analysis of the political costs and benefits of attending to a problem, or seriously considering a proposed policy, than from the analytic or technical importance of an issue or a proposal alone

In other words, political feasibility, rather than the technical or policy merits of a proposal, is often the primary criterion for determining the likelihood of a problem being placed on a policy agenda.

Policy Change in the Multiple Streams Model

So how do policies get adopted, or get 'taken up', as part of the policy agenda of government? Kingdon (1984) argues that an opportunity, or "policy window", needs to arise, or present itself, in order for policy change to occur. Changes in government, a swing in the national mood, or even imminent elections, can all present windows of opportunity that will allow for couplings – for example the coupling of the political stream to the problem stream, or the policy/solution stream to the politics stream, and so forth - to result in the adoption of a policy direction or proposal. Time, and timing, is of the essence however, since a window may close before a coupling is accomplished. A window might open for a short time, as when a swing in the national mood is only fleeting, or it may close because there is no alternative proposal readily available (Kingdon, 1984).

The second condition to be met for policy take-up to occur is the availability of policy entrepreneurs. Kingdon (1984) argues that policy entrepreneurs or brokers play an important role in facilitating the coupling of the three streams. Policy entrepreneurs play a central, if not key, role in coupling particular

solutions to particular problems, and also in ensuring that these are put to the attention of the key policy actors in the policymaking process.

To summarise this discussion, the multiple streams model depicts policymaking, and the relationship between problem definition, proposal formulation, and policy adoption, as processes that are indeterminate, characterised as they are by ambiguity and uncertainty. Each stream is driven by its own dynamic, functioning independently of the others. And policy gets to be 'made' once coupling occurs, since no stream, on its own, is the decisive one in the policy process. The coupling of one stream to another may happen by chance, or through the exploitation of 'opportunity windows' by policy entrepreneurs.

Porter & Hicks find this model to be appealing for the following reasons (1995: 11):

- it recognizes that the policy process is fluid, even messy, but still largely understandable
- it helps to explain how individual policy entrepreneurs or policy-broking organisations influence policy by making connections across streams
- it gives credit to the role of knowledge and information in policy change, without assuming that governments always take a comprehensive or rational approach to decision making

As a conclusion to this section, the following question presents itself: To what extent do these political models, which were developed to explain the policymaking processes in Western, industrialised democracies, help us understand the nature and dynamic of policymaking and policy change in developing countries, especially in Africa?

Grindle & Thomas (1991), reflecting on the utility of pluralist approaches in the understanding of public policy, argue that these perspectives do not offer an adequate explanation of the policymaking process in many developing countries. According to them, this is because in many developing countries votes and lobbying activities are not “useful currencies” for interpreting or expressing societal preferences, since not much of what happens under the rubric of policymaking gets to be discussed outside the confines of government. Consequently,

[i]n such countries, a model of policy change that takes the activities of organised interests in society as unique, independent, variables may be misleading. In fact, in many developing countries, interest groups may not be sufficiently well organised to put effective pressure on policy elites, or may not have guaranteed access to them.

(Grindle & Thomas, 1991: 24)

In other words, pluralist or political approaches presuppose a strong and vibrant civil society, which is a defining character of mature democracies, and is largely non-existent in many developing countries, especially those that are emerging from repressive and authoritarian regimes.

I find Grindle and Thomas' critique of the utility of pluralist approaches problematic on two accounts; firstly - and in this I am echoing Porter & Hicks (1995) - the study of 'Western' public policy processes, even though it does not sufficiently capture the dynamic of policy making in developing countries, does offer us a useful set of conceptual tools and categories for thinking and talking about policy processes elsewhere. Porter & Hicks (1995) rightly point out that the policy process in developing countries exhibits many of the 'regularities' of political systems of countries such as the US, regularities that transcend the structural-political differences of national systems. I would go even further and argue that as many developing countries have inherited the legislative, juridical, and executive policy-architecture of their colonial forbears, their public policy processes also share many of the structural-political features that are to be found in 'advanced' democracies. And this

probably explains why they lend themselves so readily to certain forms of policy transfer and lesson-drawing.

3.4 Understanding Knowledge Utilisation

The discussion in this section will address the relationship between research or knowledge production, and its utilisation in policymaking. The literature on research and its utilisation in policymaking emerged in the 1970s, largely in the United States, when social scientists began to study the effects of research on government decision-making (Weiss, 1991). Up until then, it had been taken for granted that what policymakers required to help them in their decision making, and which social research was best qualified to provide, was advice derived from reliable data, rigorous analysis, and well thought-out findings or research conclusions.

3.4.1 The Different Meanings of 'Use'

Weiss (1979) observes that part of the reason that there seems to be little consensus - what she refers to as a "conceptual confusion" (1979: 426) - in the knowledge/research utilisation literature with regard to the extent of the utility of research in policymaking, stems from the varied ways in which 'use' or utilisation has been understood.

For example, Caplan (1979) distinguishes between instrumental and conceptual use of knowledge in policymaking. For Caplan (1979: 462), instrumental use is:

associated with the day-to-day policy issues of limited significance and with applications involv[ing] administrative policy issues pertaining to bureaucratic management and efficiency rather than substantive public policy issues

Caplan (1979) associates conceptual use with macro or meta-level decision making, as it accounts for the gradual shifts in the general perspectives of

policymakers. He states that at the level of conceptual utilisation, research is used as one of a number of possible sources of information. Rather than relying on research alone, decision-makers are likely to

depend upon an appraisal of scientific (hard) and *extra-scientific* (soft) knowledge from a variety of sources. Both types of knowledge are combined conceptually, resulting in a judgment or perspective which is then applied broadly to decisions involving problems at the meta-level range

(Caplan, 1979: 464; emphasis in original)

However, Weiss (1979) identifies seven different meanings of 'use' that are to be found in the literature on research utilisation; these are:

knowledge-driven: This is based on the classical knowledge production model of the natural sciences, which follows the linear sequence of basic research → applied research → development → application. The assumption underpinning this model is that the mere fact that knowledge exists pushes it toward development and use. This meaning of 'use' is associated with the 'science-push' model of knowledge utilisation.

problem-solving: This model, like the one above, is also linear. However, it starts with an identified problem that seeks a solution, which research provides. The model's underlying assumption is that there is consensus between researchers and policy makers with respect to what the desired end-state should be. This understanding of 'use' underpins the engineering model of knowledge utilisation (Bulmer, 1982).

interactive: Within this notion of 'use', policy makers are actively searching for policy-relevant information that is not solely derived from social science research. Instead the research forms part of a complex decision-making process that also includes the use of experience, political insight, lobbying,

intuition, etc. This is somewhat similar to Caplan's (1979) notion of the conceptual use of knowledge.

political: Here, research is 'used' as legitimization or rationalization of previously arrived-at decisions. Research is 'used' by policy makers to bolster support or provide ammunition for opposition.

tactical: This notion of 'use' is found in situations where additional information or research is requested in order to delay action (an example from South Africa would be the anti-retroviral rollout debacle). It is often used by government agencies or other institutions as a response to a crisis that they cannot - or do not want to - immediately address.

intellectual enterprise: The understanding of 'use' here is that social science research is just one variant of the many forms of intellectual pursuits, collateral with policy, philosophy, journalism, history, and law. It thus has no unique or special relationship to policymaking.

enlightenment: This 'use' of research in policymaking occurs over time, through "knowledge creep" and "decision accretion" (Weiss, 1980). The assumption here is that with time the accumulation of research will influence policy by educating, or enlightening, the policy maker.

Weiss notes that the problem-solving or instrumentalist understanding of research utilisation is the most prevalent in the literature:

[the] prevailing concept of research utilization stresses application of specific research conclusions to specific decisional choices. A problem exists; information or understanding is needed to generate a solution to the problem or to select among alternative solutions; research provides the missing knowledge; the decision makers then reach a solution

(1977: 533)

3.4.2 *Perspectives on Knowledge Utilisation*

There are various analytical perspectives that attempt to explain why research is, or is not, utilised in policymaking. Before we discuss these, we will consider briefly some of the factors that account for the under- or non-utilisation of research in policymaking. Glover (1995) and Stone (2002) both distinguish between the supply-side (push) and the demand-led (pull), factors that are seen to contribute to the non-utilisation of research in policymaking.

Demand-side Dynamics: The Policy-Making Process

Glover (1995: 3) identifies four aspects that render the policy-making process “incompatible” with the utilisation of social research; these are:

- the objectives of policy
- the timing of policy decisions
- the nature of decision-making, and
- the question of who actually makes the decisions

With regard to the objectives of policy, Glover (1995) argues that whilst social research follows a rigorous methodology, which requires a clear definition of the problem, and the use of appropriate methods and instruments to measure variables and analyse phenomena, the policy objectives of government are loosely defined, often having ambiguous - if not sometimes contradictory - objectives, where the strategy for achieving those objectives is usually not spelt out.

With regard to the timing of policy decisions, Glover (1995) points out that governments usually express the need for research when it is apparently too late for it to have any meaningful impact on decision-making. Governments are often not receptive to suggestions for improvements in their policies or programmes, and tend to consider policy changes only when there is a

serious, or self-evident, crisis. In addition, new policies and programmes are launched without prior research having been undertaken, partly out of the belief that *ex ante* appraisal techniques are less reliable than *ex post* evaluation. Consequently, policy implementation tends to precede, rather than follow, research (Glover, 1995).

With respect to the third element of the demand-side dynamics (the nature of decisions), our discussion on the rationalist models has shown that the assumption of public policymaking as a logical process whereby decisions are made on the basis of 'facts' is seldom the case. Instead, many policy decisions are a product of a complex process that entails negotiating a consensus position through reconciling often conflicting interests. In such situations, agreement is sought only on broad statements of principle, and not on the details of costs and trade-offs, which are the preserve of research. Indeed, it is probably the case that such details - were they to be made explicit - would probably undermine much of the 'horse-trading' that is a feature of the policy process.

The fourth aspect that Glover (1995) identifies is the question of who the decision-makers in the policymaking process are. There are a multitude of actors – elected public representatives, senior civil servants, technical experts, advisers, party caucuses, etc. - playing bit-parts in the policy decisions of government. All of these players have a different way of 'reading' research reports and documents, so that it is often difficult for research to strike the correct 'pitch', since the 'client' is multifarious (Glover, 1995).

The Supply-side Dynamics: The Policy Research Process

The supply-side problems of research generally fall into three categories – which sometimes overlap - namely its relevance, timing, and presentation or language. The first one, which is usually the most frequently cited, is that the research that is supplied to policymakers often doesn't meet the required specifications, because researchers have a poor comprehension of the

realities of politics and of the policy process (Caplan, 1977; Glover, 1995; Scott, 2000; Stone, 2002; Weiss, 1980). As Glover puts it:

Academics tend to search for general laws and patterns of behaviour [which] reveal phenomena of greater theoretical and long run importance than highly specific observations...Policy makers, however, are not interested in generalizations - they want answers to the specific problems they face

(1995: 6)

The incompatibility between the products of research and the needs of policymakers is sometimes linked to the charge that researchers usually cannot, or do not, want to commit themselves to unequivocal answers or positions of the kind that policymakers expect. Of course, it is also a function of the inconclusive and ambiguous nature of much of social science research, the results and findings of which, more often than not, can be contradicted or even refuted by evidence from other studies (Wiess, 1977).

The second issue, which is a rather popular gripe among policymakers, relates to the time it takes for research results to reach decision-makers. Usually the complaint is that researchers often take 'too long' to produce results than a policymaker - who has to work under considerable political pressure, and often within tight deadlines - can tolerate.

The third supply-side factor is about the inaccessibility of the research. It is often claimed that social research is pitched at a level or in a language that makes it incomprehensible to policymakers. This is usually linked to the way that the research is presented or communicated, where it is felt that research results are presented in a language that is 'too esoteric' or theoretical to be of use in policymaking.

We will now turn to a discussion of two theory frameworks or models that attempt to explain the use, or non-use, of research in policy-making. The first

is the 'Two Communities' theory, which has been associated with the work of Caplan (1977; 1979), and seeks to explain the under- or non-utilisation of research in the policy process. The second framework, the 'Enlightenment Model' of knowledge utilisation, is associated with the work of Weiss (1977; 1979; 1980; 1991) and challenges not only the basic premise of the 'Two Communities' theory, but also the rationales for non-use that we discussed under the supply and demand side dynamics of research and policymaking.

The Two Communities Theory

The 'two communities' theory grew out of a study that Caplan (1977; 1979) conducted in the early 1970s, in which he explored the instances wherein senior administrators in the executive branch of the United States government used knowledge derived from social research in order to make policy decisions. Caplan (1979) has mentioned that the argument advanced in the 'two communities' theory has similarities to C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures*, which seeks to explain the differences between the humanities and the hard sciences. The 'two communities' theory explains the under- or non-utilisation of research on the basis of the "cultural gap" that exists between researchers and policy-makers as two distinct communities (Caplan, 1977).

According to Caplan (1977), this cultural gap is a consequence of the differences in the values, language, reward systems, and the social and professional affiliations of these two groups. Thus the problem of under-/non-utilisation is attributed to the incompatibility of the socio-cultural and behavioural worlds that are inhabited by these two communities. The 'two communities' theory has also been used to explain the rift between social scientists and policymakers with respect to the differences in their epistemological frameworks, where:

[t]he inclination for scholars to see knowledge as deriving from theory and method is mirrored by an inclination among policy makers to see knowledge as coming from experience and common sense

(Booth, 1988, quoted in Nielson, 2001: 5).

or to differences in their 'operating paradigms':

if research is bound by criteria of demonstrated method and openness,
policymaking and practice are related to criteria of relevance

(Kogan & Henkel, 2000: 27)

Echoing some of the issues raised above, Booth (1988) also argues that the reward structures of the social worlds inhabited by these two communities also reinforce these differences:

[the] structure of incentives within the academic community has also driven a wedge between social scientists and policymakers. These incentives attach greater weight to knowledge-building as against policy-forming research; to authoritativeness rather than usefulness; to the pursuit of rigor as against relevance; to the values of scientific independence as against the virtues of policy involvement; and to understanding rather than action

(quoted in Nielson, 2001: 5)

The two communities theory has had a powerful influence in the knowledge utilisation literature that focuses on the education sector. For example, the theory has found support in the higher education literature, as it is illustrated by Birnbaum's (1998) paper –discussed later in this chapter – whose title is: *'Policy scholars are from Venus; Policy makers are from Mars'*. Reimers and McGinn (1997), in their study on education research and policy change in developing countries, also endorse the basic thesis of the two communities theory, arguing that:

...the poor coupling between education research and decision making stems from the differences in the backgrounds of researchers and decision makers, differences in their social values, and differences in institutional settings

(quoted in Nielson, 2001: 6)

There have been various criticisms of the two communities theory, the primary of which is that it is premised on a linear or direct relationship between research and utilisation (Weis, 1977). In other words, it is based on an instrumental, problem-solving, notion of 'use', which then leads it towards a simple dichotomy between 'use' and 'non-use'. Weiss (1977; 1980) argues that if one departs from a different assumption, one that focuses on the enlightenment, rather than the problem-solving, function of research, then the relationship between research and utilisation can be understood differently. We will now turn to a discussion of Weiss' enlightenment model of research utilisation.

The Enlightenment Model

Weiss' (1977, 1979, 1980) starting point in addressing the question of knowledge utilisation is to challenge what has been assumed to be the dominant relationship between research and policymaking, namely that research helps to solve policy problems. It is this assumption, she argues, that led to disappointment after studies showed that the relationship between social research and social policy interventions was, at best, tenuous. For Weiss, many of the rationales for 'non-use' – which we discussed in the previous section on the demand- and supply-side dynamics of knowledge utilisation - are premised on an instrumental notion of 'use'. As Weiss observes:

instrumental "utilization" is what many observers have expected and looked for in vain. Failing to find it, they have concluded that research is ignored. Instrumental use seems in fact to be rare, particularly when issues are complex, the consequences are uncertain, and a multitude of actors are engaged in the decision-making process, i.e. in the making of *policy*

(1980: 396; emphasis in original)

Weiss' (1977) analysis of various studies, as well as her own research, leads her to conclude that government officials use research less to arrive at solutions, than to "orient" themselves to problems. Government officials and

policymakers use research to help them think about issues, to gain new ideas and perspectives, and to define the 'problematics' of a situation. As she puts it:

...much of this use is not deliberate, direct, and targeted, but [is] a result of the long-term percolation of social science concepts, theories, and findings into the climate of informed opinion

(Weiss, 1977: 534)

The problem, however, is that this process of knowledge diffusion, or what she refers to as the "undirected seepage" of social research into the policy sphere Weiss (1977: 534), takes place almost undetected, over a prolonged period of time. Confounding the situation is that:

...the policymaker himself is often unaware of the source of his ideas...Bits of information seep into his mind, uncatalogued, without citation. He finds it very difficult to retrieve the reference to any single bit of knowledge. If we ask him about the effect of social research on his decisions, he usually will not be able to give an accurate account – or even be aware that he derived his ideas from the social sciences

(Weiss, 1977: 534)

Unlike the two communities theory, the enlightenment model does not consider a shared value-framework or world-view between researchers and policymakers to be a crucial determinant of the likelihood of research 'take-up' in policymaking. It suggests that policymakers believe it is a good thing for research to challenge the prevailing - even their own 'taken-for-granted' - assumptions; indeed, they welcome research that is controversial.

The enlightenment model also suggests that research may be 'useful' even though it does not address itself to the "operating feasibilities" of the day (Weiss, 1977: 544). The model sees a role for research that is contemplative, that interrogates and clarifies concepts, and that provides orientations and empirical generalisations that inform policy. If we link this discussion to our

earlier one on the different meanings of research, we can see that the role of research in this model is that of providing ideas. In her later writing, Weiss (1991) develops her thinking further by providing a role for advocacy in policy research. She suggests that policy research can have a greater impact in influencing policy when it becomes part of, or is linked to, advocacy.

The section that follows will focus on a discussion of the higher education literature on knowledge utilisation.

3.5 Higher Education Research and Policymaking

There has been a growing literature on higher education research and its utilisation in policymaking. Much of this literature has focused on the US context (Birnbaum, 1998; El-Khawas, 2000; Peterson, 2000; Terenzini, 1996), while more recently there have also been studies on Western European experience (Bleiklie, 2002; Kogan & Henkel, 2000; Scott, 2000; Teichler, 2000). It must also be mentioned that, unlike the contributions from Weiss and Caplan, much of this literature is largely reflective and conceptual, focusing on the analysis of broad trends and developments, rather than being a product of empirical research.

For Scott (2000), higher education research had its golden age when it was still in its infancy as a field of study, and was not yet 'professionalised'. The important contributions to this nascent field were being made by leading scholars such as Burton Clark and Clark Kerr - who were from the traditional social science disciplines - and governments were keen to listen and engage with these early debates as they were themselves devising strategies to develop their systems more systematically, especially in the post-war period.

However, the field of higher education studies has not been preoccupied only with informing the policymaking process. Scott (2000: 139) points to three purposes of higher education research, namely to:

- improve practice in teaching and learning (for example in curriculum development, assessment strategies, quality improvement, etc) and in administration and management (this is usually done under the rubric of institutional research)
- advance its frontiers as a field of study or a theoretical science (through the development of graduate programmes and the establishment of journals)
- influence policymaking or to provide policy options to those in decision-making authority

The discussion that follows will focus on the last two areas which, in fact, are seen to be in tension in much of the literature on higher education research.

3.5.1 The Dilemma Facing Higher Education Research

It seems that higher education research is facing something of a predicament on both sides of the Atlantic: it has had to establish itself as a field of serious academic study *and* be seen to be of relevance to policymaking. Reflecting on the situation in Western Europe, Teichler (2000) sees the challenge facing higher education researchers as being one of pursuing a theoretically and methodologically sound approach to research, in order to distinguish itself, and be seen to be offering something different, from applied policy research and consultancy. However, higher education research has to accomplish this whilst also having to ensure its (financial) sustainability by providing evidence of its utility to problem-solving activities, the primary arena of which is policymaking.

For Peterson (2000), writing in the context of the United States, the question is whether higher education research, by gravitating towards the social science disciplines, has gained legitimacy as a field of serious academic study, or whether, in seeking financial sustainability and political legitimacy, it has subsumed its interests to those of policymakers and practitioners.

Peterson (2000: 23) sees the three drivers of higher education research – which he refers to as a “trichotomy” – as being in tension; these are:

- the conceptual and theoretical models derived from other academic disciplines
- the methodological approaches that are ‘native’ to higher education, many of which may be of limited generalisability, and
- the changing needs and demands of practitioners (which often do not add value to the conceptual understanding of higher education as a field of study)

Terenzini (1996) on the other hand, characterises the dilemma facing higher education studies as a struggle between ‘disciplinarity’ and an applications-focused orientation. In his Presidential Address to the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) in the US, Terenzini (1996) argues that higher education as a field of study has failed in its mission to be of relevance to policymakers since it has drifted away from its roots as an applied field. This, according to him, accounts for the gulf between higher education research and higher education policymaking. For Terenzini:

The study of higher education was (and is) an *applied* field of study, not a social science discipline in itself, and the difference is a significant one

(1996: 7; italics in original)

While Terenzini’s (1996) characterisation of the dilemma facing higher education research in the US seems to be a variant of the two communities’ thesis, for him the chasm is not a consequence of the difference in values or in world views - although one can draw such an inference - between higher education researchers and higher education practitioners, but is a function of the changed approach to the study of higher education. For Terenzini therefore, the ‘disciplinarianisation’ of higher education studies, with its consequent pre-occupation with theory and “fidelity” to a set of methods, has

led to the development of narrow specialisations, whose effect has been to “reduce or eliminate access to that work by practitioners and policymakers” (Terenzini 1996: 7).

Terenzini (1996) suggests that the development of higher education as a field of study grew out of a need to address the issues and problems facing higher education in the United States through the application of social science research techniques and approaches to problem solving. In other words, Terenzini’s understanding of the role and purpose of higher education research is located within Bulmer’s (1982) engineering model. He further claims that higher education, as a profession and a field of study, has “abandoned its roots” (Terenzini, 1996: 8), having focused solely on one conception of research, that of scholarship as discovery, to the exclusion of scholarship as application². Quoting Boyer, Terenzini appeals for a return to the scholarship of application, arguing that such a return will give rise to scholarly activity that:

moves towards engagement as the scholar asks, “How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems?”... And further, “Can social problems *themselves* define an agenda for scholarly investigation?”

(Boyer, 1990: 21; emphasis in original)

The final point Terenzini makes is that, in the light of an accountability-driven funding climate, the higher education research community cannot expect continued public support if its research does not serve public needs, or if it becomes “a literature without an audience” (Keller, 1985: 8, quoted in Terenzini, 1996: 8). He then proceeds to identify a number of “empirical black holes”³ that “cry out” for serious attention from higher education researchers (Terenzini, 1996: 8).

3.5.2 *Exploring the Utilisation of Higher Education Research*

Birnbaum's (1998) article – which is also based on a presentation made at an ASHE conference – is partly a response to Terenzini, and to other “sceptics” who are critical of higher education research's utility to policymaking. Birnbaum's starting point is that higher education policy would be weakened, rather than strengthened, if higher education researchers were to define their agenda for research on the basis of the interests of policymakers.

Citing several assessments by prominent US educationists⁴, Birnbaum (1998) argues that such views are based on four misleading assumptions about the relationship between higher education research and policy making; these are the following:

Assumption A: There is agreement among policymakers with regard to the nature of policy problems, and consequently, about the appropriate research agenda for higher education

This is the assumption underlying Terenzini's (1996) critique of the non-responsiveness of higher education policy research to the “consequential problems” facing US higher education. Birnbaum's (1998) retort is that it is difficult to predict with any certainty which research problem will be of relevance to policy, since policy issues change over time. Further, as policymakers themselves change with changes in government, it may not be possible to predict in advance which policy problems will be on the policymakers' radar screens (Birnbaum's, 1998).

Assumption B: The research being conducted by scholars is not relevant to policy

This is linked to the first assumption and, according to Birnbaum (1998), is not backed by any concrete empirical evidence. Furthermore, Birnbaum (1998) argues that part of the problem lies with the ways that policymakers define a

problem, which is usually based on finding 'quick-fixes' to immediate problems, which may, just as quickly, change, thus making the research irrelevant. For Birnbaum, there is little that higher education scholars can do to make higher education policy scholarship of more *immediate* use to policymakers.

Birnbaum (1998) further argues that an agenda for higher education scholarship cannot be defined in advance since what will be relevant for policy in the future is not known. Instead, higher education scholarship should continue to be driven by

personal and professional interests developed in the intellectual marketplace
of ideas, rather than in a planned marketplace of current problems

(Birnbaum, 1998: 8)

For Birnbaum then, the challenge for policy researchers is to try to create knowledge that can be of use in an "indefinite future" (1998: 5). A similar point is made by Scott (2000), who has argued that the lack of currency of higher education research arises from the "short-termism" of policymakers. The funding for research that is based on reflective and critical intellectual values and practices, and which has an open agenda, has become less acceptable (Scott, 2000). This has been supplanted by customer-driven, short-term, investigations, which are more akin to management consultancy than higher education policy research.

Assumption C: Policy research is not used by policy makers

Birnbaum (1998:7) argues that this assumption, which is based on an instrumentalist understanding of the relationship between research and policy, is naïve, since it posits policy scholarship as an

independent variable and policymaking [as] a dependent variable. A more realistic view is to consider them both as independent, collateral variables

He further points out that what is important

is not that individual [research] studies affect individual [policy] decisions, but that scholarly work over time influences the systems of knowledge and belief that give meaning to policy

(Birnbaum, 1998: 7).

Birnbaum's response to Assumptions B and C echoes Weiss, who argues that policy decisions

often accrete through multiple, disjointed, stages [so that] looking for 'blockbuster' impact from research studies represents a misreading of the nature of policy making

(1982: 621)

Assumption D: The relevance of policy research would be enhanced by closer communication and better dissemination

For Birnbaum (1998), policymakers do not suffer from a lack of information, but from 'overload' that is a result of too much information. What they do lack is access to analytical information that would help them understand the nuances of the difficult problems they face (Birnbaum, 1998). In other words, increasing communication and/or interactions between researchers and policymakers may be important, but it does not constitute a sufficient condition for improving the utility of research. Caplan (1979: 461) is making a similar point when he states that:

it does not follow from our data, however, that an alliance of social scientists and policy makers is the panacea which will produce relevant research and allow translation of the results of scholarly analysis into terms of practical politics. The notion that more and better contact may result in improved understanding and greater utilization may be true, but there are also conditions where familiarity might well breed contempt rather than admiration

This view is also shared by Knott & Wildavsky (1991), who argue that while dissemination is only indirectly related to utilisation it is repeatedly urged as a solution. For them:

the task becomes one not of the wholesale force-feeding of ignorant policy makers by knowledgeable disseminators, but of the discovery of those types of [knowledge] transfer that are worthwhile under varying conditions

Knott & Wildavsky (1991:215)

In other words, researchers should exercise caution not to inundate policymakers with ever more data, but instead should seek innovative ways of informing the policy process.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature on the utilisation of knowledge in policymaking. We began the discussion with an account of the various ways that different forms of research can be distinguished, either through the purposes it serves, namely as description, exploration, and explanation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), or the various meanings that are attached to its usage, for example research as data, as ideas and as argumentation (Weiss, 1991). This discussion served as a springboard for the extensive discussion of the literature on the models of the policymaking process.

That discussion focussed on two main models, the rational and the political models of the policymaking process. It was shown that the rational models - namely the linear, the incremental and the interactive - saw policymaking as a logical and coherent process of decision-making, with clear and definite stages of development. These models, although they differ with respect to where they place their emphasis within the various stages of the policymaking process, all privilege the role played by elected public officials (policy elites) in the formal processes of public policy development.

In contrast, the political models – whose focus is the process of policy *change*, rather than policymaking *making* - highlight the role played by political dynamics outside the formal policy process. As such, they give prominence to the role of non-governmental or civil society groupings and interests in policy development. Although the bulk of this literature seeks to explain policymaking in modern or mature democracies, we have argued that the issues that the literature raises have important lessons for developing countries like South Africa.

The second part of the review of the literature has highlighted the complex nature of the relationship between the production of knowledge and its utilisation in policymaking. Our discussion has provided an overview of some of the factors - from the demand- and the supply-side – that account for the poor utilisation of research in policymaking. These factors also featured prominently in the literature on the relationship between higher education research and policymaking. A key debate within the higher education literature has been on the nature and purpose of higher education research as a field of study, which is captured by the dilemma (Peterson, 2000; Teichler, 2000; Terenzini, 1996) of striving to become a legitimate field of study of the social sciences with its own established canons and modes of enquiry on the one hand, whilst also demonstrating relevance to addressing the (policy) problems of the day.

The next chapter will build on the pertinent issues raised by the literature review by exploring these further, in this case within the context of higher education policy development in South Africa.

- ¹ The different phases of the policymaking process in South African higher education are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
- ² Citing Boyer (1990), Terenzini (1996) identifies four different forms of scholarship, namely the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching.
- ³ Some of the issues Terenzini (1996) highlights are the educational attainment of minority students, the educational and social significance of community colleges, student financial aid policy, institutional restructuring, and the role and impact of technology in distance education.
- ⁴ Some of the comments Birnbaum (1998) quotes are the following:

"higher education research is stale, irrelevant,...of little use to policymakers", (Layzell, 1990)

"[higher education research is] lifeless and pedestrian, inward looking and parochial, the product of assembly-line research that has generated few new findings and challenging ideas", (Conrad, 1989)

"college and university presidents do not consult the [higher education] literature or use it...If the research on higher education ended, it would scarcely be missed", (Keller, 1985)

Chapter Four

From Critique to Reconstruction: The Process of Policy Development in Higher Education

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the process of policy development in South African higher education. Policy development in higher education can be traced to the launch of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) in December 1990 by the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC). This chapter will divide the process of policy development in South African higher education into four phases, which more-or-less coincide with some of the defining moments in South Africa's political history on the one hand, as well as the key milestones of the post-apartheid higher education system on the other. A feature of the first phase of policy development, which is the period leading up to the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990, were the popular struggles against apartheid education, which were waged by community and mass-based organisations mainly, under the banner of the NECC.

The second phase, which has also been referred to as the 'negotiations era', is the period leading up to the first democratic elections (from 1990 to 1994), and is distinguished by the emergence of national 'negotiating forums' in areas such as education, health, housing, local government, labour, etc. These emerged as part of the political life of this period, the primary arena of which were negotiations between the principal political parties. These negotiations, better known as the CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) talks, sought to reach a political consensus among the adversaries on the nature and form that the new democratic dispensation would assume.

The third phase, which covers the years 1995 to 1999, is the period during which the legislative framework for the transformation of the higher education system was developed, and begins with the establishment of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) by the then-President Nelson Mandela in February 1995. The focus during this period was on setting the agenda for the transformation of the system, as well as creating the institutional architecture that would underpin the new regulatory framework (for example in planning, funding and quality assurance) for higher education.

The fourth phase, which is the post-1999 period and coincides with the passing of the presidential baton from Mandela to Mbeki, sees the focus shifting from institution-building to implementation, or 'delivery', and its signal moment, in the context of higher education policy development, is the unveiling of the National Plan for Higher Education by the Ministry of Education in February 2001. We will now discuss each of these phases in more detail, focusing in particular on the key higher education policy developments in each phase, on the nature of policy research during each period, as well as the role of research in the broader process of higher education policy development.

4.2 The First Phase of Policy Development: pre-1990

It is probably incorrect to characterise the pre-1990 period as the 'first phase' of policy development because, strictly speaking, no formal and conscious process of constructing policy propositions or positions was undertaken prior to 1990. However, it was an important period – in policy history terms - since the popular struggles that were waged against apartheid education during most of the 1980s provided the background material for much of the writing that emerged in this period. It is important to remember that the 1980s were characterised by mass mobilisations in opposition to apartheid education, which were often met by a violent response from the state.

Consequently, much of the research undertaken by progressive research organisations in this period - especially the two Education Policy Units (EPUs) that were established in late 1987 by the NECC at the Universities of Natal and the Witwatersrand - was geared towards servicing the broader, mass-based education movement. Very little, if any, of the research that was produced in this phase was geared towards contributing to policy development. If anything, much of the research that emerged from the two EPUs and the broader progressive research community in general was academically-oriented writing that developed a sophisticated theoretical critique of apartheid education and its policies. Muller (2000: 272) has stated that for much of this period, the EPUs were “confused and torn by conflicting loyalties” between engaging in activism on the one hand, and undertaking scientific/intellectual work, and shuttled “unsatisfactorily” between the two.

If we reflect on the role of (policy) research during this period, it is clear that it played very much an ideological and mobilisation function. Although the research that was produced by the EPUs was targeted at an academic audience, it was also directed at providing the NECC leadership with ‘intellectual assistance’; however, as Muller (2002) has suggested, what this assistance or support entailed was never fully clarified to the EPUs by the NECC. Nevertheless the intent was clear: the EPUs and other independent progressive academics and NGOs that were aligned to the broader democratic movement were expected to provide ‘intellectual ammunition’ to the NECC’s campaigns against apartheid education. In this respect, the role of research was seen to be firmly in the service of the broader political struggles being waged against the apartheid state. It is probably safe to conclude that the primary purpose of the research produced by the EPUs during this period was to undermine and de-legitimate the ideological and epistemological foundations of apartheid education.

4.3 The Second Phase of Policy Development: 1990-1994

A key component in the debates and deliberations on the nature of post-apartheid South Africa was on the role that the new democratic state would play in reconstruction and development, and especially in the transformation of sectors such as health, education, and the economy. This period is unique in that the policy development process was characterised by a high degree of participation by mass-based community organisations. NGOs and other organs of civil society played a major role in the various policy debates and initiatives that were geared towards developing alternative policy options not only in education but in other (social) sectors as well.

Strictly speaking, however, most of these initiatives were less about policy development *per se*, but were concerned with resolving the crises and (political) stalemates that had engulfed many of the key sectors of South African society, for example in local government (rent boycotts) and in education (class boycotts). Another objective of these mass-based initiatives was to establish the framework of principles, values and goals that would underpin the transformation of these sectors. As it was mentioned earlier, a part of the explanation for the high degree of popular participation in the various policy deliberations during this period were the (negotiating) forums that were set up in areas such as housing, local government, health, etc. An important initiative in education was the National Education and Training Forum (NETF), which was established in 1993 to

initiate a process involving education and training stakeholders [who would] arrive at and establish agreements on the resolution of the crises in education, the restructuring of education for a democratic South Africa, and the formulation of policy frameworks for the long term restructuring of the education and training system which are linked to the social and economic development needs of South Africa

(NETF, 1993: 1)

With regard to policy development, the key initiative in this period was the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), whose central objective was to interrogate policy options in all areas of education, within a value framework that was derived from the ideals of the broad democratic movement (NEPI, 1992). Overall, the NEPI process was an attempt to address three objectives, namely to:

- provide information about the state of education and a lens to focus on the values that ought to underpin the specification of policies for a future education dispensation
- stimulate public debate on education policy in all spheres of society
- begin a process of developing capacity for future policy analysis

(NEPI, 1992: *vii*)

NEPI, which was an initiative of the NECC that was conducted between 1990 and 1992, was a massive education research undertaking, probably the biggest such exercise ever undertaken in education in South Africa. It involved over 300 academics, educators and activists, who were organised into twelve research groups covering areas from early childhood educare to higher education (NEPI, 1992). The main achievement of NEPI, insofar as the higher education sector was concerned, was to facilitate a certain measure of convergence among the main actors (who were in opposition to the apartheid state) in higher education with regard to the shared goals, values and principles that would underpin a transformed system of higher education.

Underlying the NEPI approach - of developing policy options rather than defining clear policy positions for a future democratic education dispensation - was an understanding among progressive academics at the time that their role was to provide, in the first instance, a critique of the conjunctural conditions of apartheid education, rather than to engage in direct policy formulation. Further, the purpose of the exercise was to analyse and

formulate various alternative options which would be taken up for consideration by the democratic movement, and in particular the ANC as the 'government-in-waiting'.

And because progressive academics associated the policymaking process (under apartheid) with remote, undemocratic, and reactionary practises, it was an exercise that many had grown suspicious of, if not uncomfortable with. This view continued to hold sway for some time within progressive organisations such as the EPU's, so that even when a democratic government had assumed power, these groups were reluctant to participate in direct policy development initiatives. Instead, as Sehoole (2002: 92) observes: "they were happy to continue analysing policy and presenting options to government."

Indeed, what is surprising – with the benefit of hindsight – about the NEPI exercise is the absence of any reference to it contributing to education policy development, especially given the fact that the NEPI report was published only two years prior to the first democratic elections. This is in contrast to the health policy sector for example, where progressive intellectuals were generally keen to get involved in policymaking. For them April 1994 signified an era where they would

see our policy proposals adopted by government and implemented...No longer on the fringe to be ignored or grudgingly acknowledged [by the old regime], we would now be driving the policy research process and be involved in policy making at every stage

(Price, 1995: 27)

Sehoole (2002) states that a possible reason for NEPI's reluctance to provide concrete policy propositions at the time was a tacit acknowledgement of the lack of policy expertise within the progressive education community. This was partly because, up until the NECC's establishment of the NEPI exercise, there had not been any serious or sustained attempt at developing education policy alternatives in South Africa. Further, Sehoole (2002) argues that the

preference for options development was also a tactic on the part of the progressive education movement to 'buy time' until a clearer political direction was provided by the ANC, which was then re-establishing itself in the country after its life in exile.

Although the EPU's played an influential role in the conceptualisation and the setting up of the NEPI exercise, as well as in shaping and influencing some of the key strategic decisions that were taken at the time – especially through the participation of the EPU Directors Forum in the NEPI Editorial Group – their contribution to the actual research effort of NEPI, in the form of research papers and contributions, was negligible (Taylor, 1992). It seems that the shift from undertaking research that was immersed in critical reflection to being involved in the development of policy options for a government-in-waiting was not a smooth transition for the EPU's. This impression finds favour with Muller (2000: 273), who points out that the EPU's greeted with "stunned apprehension" the rapid changes that followed after February 1990, since what was required by the progressive movement – policy assistance in preparing to govern – went against the EPU's' whole training and orientation, steeped as it was at that time in critique. Reinforcing this viewpoint, Sehoole (2002: 92) argues that the EPU's' tradition of critique gave rise to a level of "hostility" towards work that veered towards policy formulation, since this was regarded as the domain of government.

Reflecting on the role of social and policy research in this period, Singh (1992) identifies three elements – what she calls "vital dimensions" – that any research ought to incorporate, namely a 'reconstructive' dimension that would focus on (policy) planning for the future, a 'political' dimension that would continue to promote a political order that doesn't marginalise the majority needs and interests, and a 'process' dimension that would facilitate widespread, popular, participation in policy decision-making. Singh's view echoes a perspective that was also being articulated within EPU circles at the

time, where their role was seen as that of 'critical reconstructionists' (Chisholm, 1992; Taylor, 1992).

By this was meant that the central role of the EPU's ought to be to place the research questions being posed by organisations (primarily from the democratic movement) in a systemic perspective, and to explore their underlying value framework and assumptions, as well as their implications for different policy options. There was thus a strong view - which came to be reflected in the way in which the recommendations of the NEPI report were written - that the EPU's were not policy actors pursuing the views of one or another constituency. Rather, the main objective of their research endeavour was to examine the policy proposals of the democratic movement, as well as those of the apartheid state, in a systematic and critical manner, and to explore the value and transformative implications of the options being proposed (Taylor, 1992).

The establishment of the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) by the ANC in late 1992 - as its education policy "think tank" - saw the EPU's getting more involved in research projects that had a more direct link to the formulation of policy proposals for a new education dispensation. The CEPD played a key role in the early development of the ANC's education policy framework, and was responsible for co-ordinating the research work that led to the production of the ANC's *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (the so-called 'Yellow Book'), which was published in January 1994. The CEPD was also responsible for the co-ordination of the 'Implementation Plan for Education and Training' (IPET), an exercise which followed the publication of the 'Yellow Book', and whose objective was to help the newly elected government to develop an implementation agenda for a transformed education system.

Although the market for education policy research expanded considerably in the years leading up to the first democratic elections in 1994¹, it seems that

many of the major research commissions (outside of NEPI and IPET), and in particular those funded by international agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) by-passed the EPU community (Samoff, 1995; Taylor, 1992). Taylor (1992) attributes these missed opportunities to a lack of critical mass of experienced researchers among the EPUs, who would be able to make the desired impact in the policy field. For Samoff, it was clear that several of the major donor agencies had a low regard for the quality of the EPUs' work, and had dismissed NEPI as "insubstantial, unrigorous, and far too polemical to be either analytically or practically useful" (1995: 29).

With regard to the general perceptions about the role of research in policymaking during this period, it is clear that, from the perspective of the democratic movement and the newly-elected government, research was seen as an important, if not central, element in policymaking (UWC-EPU, 1994). From the perspective of progressive academics in general, and the research community of the EPUs in particular, there seems to have been an ambivalent position, where, on the one hand, there was a keenness to see the products of their research being used in influencing the policy deliberations of the new South African education dispensation while, on the other hand, there was also a growing apprehension to being regarded as playing a 'hand-maidenly' role to the incoming government.

4.4 The Third Phase of Policy Development: 1995-1999

The central concern in this period was on setting the (policy) agenda for the transformation of the higher education system, which took as its point of departure the broad principles and values that were the outcome of the NEPI process, as well as the subsequent initiatives (such as the ANC 'Yellow Book and IPET) that were undertaken under the auspices of the CEPD. Part of this agenda-setting exercise was to be achieved through an elaboration of the overall policy framework that would underpin a transformed education system, as well as a process of institution-building that would be realised through the

development of capacity within the new state itself, and the creation of regulatory bodies such as the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). These new state, and parastatal, organs would be responsible for undertaking the substantive policy development and implementation in areas such as the national qualifications framework, higher education funding, planning, and quality assurance.

The primary vehicle for the agenda-setting exercise in this period, of course, was the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). The NCHE was set up in February 1995 by the newly-elected Government of National Unity (GNU) to advise the new government on, among others:

- what constitutes higher education
- the national goals of the (new) system of higher education
- the institutional types required by the system, their particular missions, their respective inter-relationships, and their relationships to the state
- the structures required to govern and administer higher education
- the funding mechanisms for institutions and students in higher education

(NCHE Proclamation, Government Gazette No. 16243, 1995)

The CSHE played a major role both in the conceptualisation of the NCHE, as well as in the research undertaken for the NCHE². The NCHE reported its findings to President Mandela in August 1996, and many of its recommendations formed the basis for the new higher education legislative framework, namely the White Paper on Higher Education Transformation and the Higher Education Act, No. 101, of 1997 (henceforth referred to as the White Paper and the HE Act, respectively). These two pieces of legislation together form the pillar of the new government's agenda for the transformation of the higher education system in South Africa.

It has been argued that one of the most significant contributions of the NCHE to policy development has been at the symbolic level (Denyssen and Breier, 2002). As the former Research Director of the NCHE has commented:

[The NCHE] was an extremely participative, [and] consultative process... There were over 100 papers written, and we had these huge consultative jamborees in which we consulted the people. Nothing they ever said at those jamborees changed what we wrote in the report, but they were great events!

The central issue was unity – you've got to bring people together in this fragmented society and country – and that, in retrospect, was what the consultative jamborees and getting people together [were] in aid of.

(Cloete in Denyssen and Breier, 2002: 10)

In other words, besides developing a set of principles that would underpin a new higher education system - namely equity, democracy, efficiency, and development - an important achievement of the NCHE process was to establish a broad consensus among the different stakeholders around the transformation agenda that would underpin South African higher education. As a result, different constituencies with competing interests were able to identify with different components of the NCHE's central principles. The NCHE also succeeded in developing a policy consensus which made it possible for the legislative framework that is contained in the White Paper and the HE Act to gain wide acceptance.

Given the history of the apartheid ideology of exclusivity, the NCHE took a conscious decision that its process of developing a framework for the transformation of higher education would have to be consultative and transparent (NCHE, 1996). For Moja and Hayward (2000) this was a crucial decision since it facilitated effective policy formulation in a way that gained the support of most stakeholders, government officials, the higher education community, and the public at large.

Another feature of the approach to policy development during this period – although this had its beginning during the NEPI exercise – was the role that was played by overseas agencies and consultants. There were a plethora of international agencies that offered financial and technical assistance to the NCHE. No less than ten international agencies and research centres (from the African Association of Universities to the World Bank) provided technical, financial, and research support to the NCHE (NCHE, 1996). Jansen has argued – without providing any concrete evidence to support his claim – that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in particular, played “a crucial role in shaping the landscape within which education policy was developed after apartheid” (Jansen, 2001: 21)

Although it is true that agencies such as the USAID may have exercised some influence through their funding of important initiatives such as the Tertiary Education Linkages Project (TELP) – a project that is targeted at developing capacity at historically disadvantaged institutions – their influence on strategic decision-making within the NCHE was negligible. The Chairman of the NCHE has maintained that the NCHE process was never dominated by (overseas) consultants, but was an interactive one, whereby “we were learning from them and they were learning [from] our context” (quoted in Sehoole, 2002: 389).

What are we to make of the nature and role of policy research during this period? In reflecting on its own role and contribution during this period, the CSHE has stated that the policy development phase up to the promulgation of the new legislative framework in 1997 was characterised by research whose overwhelming emphasis was primarily on quantitative analysis of trends and descriptive audits (Annual Report, 2002: 5). This is not surprising, of course, since one of the key obstacles to undertaking research in the early stages of the policy development process was the unavailability of reliable, and up-to-date, information on the higher education system.

Consequently, much of the research that was done - although intended as an input to policymaking, in the last instance – involved the gathering of basic data, which was a time-consuming, but necessary, task if the key decision-makers were to make sense of the challenges they faced, given the enormous gaps that existed with regard to information that was available. Further, this period displays some of the features of the policy transfer model, especially in relation to the extensive role played by foreign experts in public policy development. Understandably, this was driven by the need to play “catch-up” to international best-practice, after a long period of (political and intellectual) isolation.

4.5 The Fourth Phase of Policy Development: post-1999

The fourth phase of policy development commenced with the appointment of a new Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, and also coincided, at the level of the national political scene, with Thabo Mbeki's assumption of the presidency of the country – a political era that has been described as ‘delivery-focused’ by some commentators. A feature of this period was the increasing prominence of the role played by the Ministry of Education in policy decision-making, which saw a concomitant decline of direct stakeholder involvement in higher education policy development processes (Badat, 2003). In contrast to the two previous periods, which were characterised by a relatively ‘hands-off’ governmental steering approach to system change, there were now much more determined policy interventions from the Ministry of Education, in areas such as the restructuring of the institutional landscape, language policy, the regulation private higher education, distance education, funding, planning, etc. (see Table 1).

One of the challenges that President Mbeki put to his new Minister of Education was to pose the question: “Is higher education, will higher education be, a system for the 21st century?” (Department of Education, 2000). In response, the Minister of Education instructed the Council of Higher Education (CHE) to set up a task team that would advise him on the key

principles, and the details of a framework and strategy, for the reconfiguration of the higher education system (CHE, 2000). The CHE duly obliged, and at the end of June 2000 submitted to the Minister its report, titled: "Towards a New Higher Education Landscape"; this report is also referred to as the 'Shape and Size' document. Eight months thereafter, in February 2001, the Minister of Education released the National Plan for Higher Education, which was the Ministry's response to the CHE report.

A key initiative that was announced in the National Plan was the establishment of a National Working Group which was to advise the Minister of Education "on appropriate arrangements for consolidating the provision of higher education on a regional basis through establishing new institutional and organisational forms, including the feasibility of reducing the number of higher education institutions"³. The National Working Group (NWG) submitted its report to the Minister of Education early in 2002. The NWG report formed the basis of the Minister of Education's proposals for the restructuring of higher education through mergers, which were later approved by the Cabinet in May 2002. Much of the background work for this entire process was carried out within the Department of Education, an issue we shall return to in the next chapter.

The following table lists some of the key policy initiatives that were undertaken during this phase, many of which were initiated on the basis of a request for advice from the Ministry of Education to the CHE, and others which the Department of Education did on its own initiative. Some of these, for example on language policy, have already resulted in the adoption of a new policy by the government.

Table 1: Some of the Major Policy Initiatives in the Fourth Phase

POLICY INITIATIVE	PROCESS/ACTIVITY	OUTCOME/S
Initiatives on restructuring the higher education institutional landscape (1999 onwards)	Ministry request to CHE to provide advice on restructuring the HE institutional landscape Release of CHE report: Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the Twenty-First Century (2000)	Cabinet approves in late 2002 Ministry of Education's proposals to reduce the 36 public institutions to 21 through mergers and incorporations. New 'comprehensive' institution created through the mergers of a university and technikon
To develop a new academic policy for the structure, duration and nomenclature of qualifications and programmes (initiated in 1999)	CHE Task Team produces a Discussion Document in 2001 titled: <i>A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education</i>	Public comment and steps towards finalisation of New Academic Policy by the Ministry in 2003
Minister requests advice on the criteria and conditions for institutions to use the terms 'university', 'technikon', 'college'	CHE establishes investigation under auspices of its Shape and Size Standing Committee	CHE advice to the Ministry in late 2003
Initiative in 2000 on language policy for HE with request from Ministry for CHE advice	CHE produces policy advice report for Minister in 2001	Ministry releases <i>Language Policy for Higher Education</i> in late 2002, based on the CHE's advice

POLICY INITIATIVE	PROCESS/ACTIVITY	OUTCOME/S
Initiative by the Ministries of Education and Labour to review the nature and role of the NQF in higher education (2001)	Ministries jointly establish a Study Team to review the NQF in education, to which CHE and various HE actors motivate for major changes in the implementation of the NQF in HE	Ministries' decisions awaited in response to proposals of the Study Team
CHE initiative to review co-operative governance in higher education (2001)	CHE Task Team conducts investigation and releases Research Report and Policy Report with some 20 recommendations for comment	Amendment to Higher Education Act in 2002 to reduce the size of Councils of institutions
Ministerial request for advice on various aspects of the provision of distance education in higher education	CHE establishes a Task Team comprising national and international specialists which conducts investigations on a range of issues	CHE advice to the Ministry submitted in late 2003
Ministerial request for advice on the nomenclature of proposed comprehensive institutions	CHE advises Minister on the nomenclature of proposed comprehensive institutions	Ministry accepts advice that all comprehensive institutions should provisionally be called universities
Ministerial request for advice on the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) and higher education	CHE initiates debate through its journal, <i>Kagisano</i> , commissions work and convenes a national seminar	CHE advises the Ministry in mid-2003

Sources: Badat, 2003; CHE Annual Report, 2002/2003

4.6 Conclusion

As a concluding summary, this chapter has provided an overview of the higher education policy development process from the period just prior to 1990 till the present. As a backdrop to this overview, we have traced the role that the EPU's have played in policy development processes. The chapter has suggested that the best way to understand the process of higher education policy development in South Africa is to examine it through a 'periodisation' of its evolution into four phases, which more-or-less correspond with some of key moments and events in the development of higher education in South Africa.

Although borne in the crucible of the anti-apartheid struggles, the EPU's sought to transcend the oppositional mode of the time, through their involvement in projects that were assisting the democratic movement in formulating policy proposals for a new higher education dispensation. It is clear, however, that the EPU's struggled with the challenge of undertaking 'reconstructive' work – through their participation in policy development initiatives – whilst also maintaining an 'intellectual independence' from the political forces they were a product of, if not aligned to. They sought to achieve the latter by raising their own funds in order to conduct and sustain independent, critical, research, while also safeguarding their right to interrogate the policy propositions of the democratic government.

The chapter that follows will provide a more detailed overview of the CSHE from its inception up to the present, with a focused discussion on the nature of its research programme.

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- ¹ According to Samoff (1995: 29) more than twenty major studies on education policy research were commissioned by national and international aid organisations in the period leading to the elections.
- ² The CSHE's founding director, Harold Wolpe, was a key player in the process of developing the terms of reference of the Commission. The CSHE itself hosted one of the key research groups of the NCHE, namely the Programmes, Institutional and Qualifications Framework Task Group, and a number of its researchers were active participants in the various working groups of the Commission.
- ³ Department of Education (2001) *Terms of Reference for the Ministerial National Working Group*, page 1.

Chapter Five

A Description of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of the Western Cape

5.1 Introduction

Having discussed the international literature on knowledge utilisation in Chapter 3, and the evolution of higher education policy development in South Africa in Chapter 4, we will now examine in more detail the organisational dynamics of the CSHE. This will be done through a description of its organisational history, as well as the views of a number of key informants who were associated with the CSHE on the one hand, and the Department of Education's Higher Education Branch on the other. As it was mentioned in the introduction, a decision was made at the outset not to focus on any particular project within the CSHE but to examine research utilisation in relation to the work of the unit as a whole.

This chapter will examine the CSHE's work in relation to the changes brought about by the broader political and policy climate, which we discussed in the previous chapter. However, the discussion will not follow the sequence of the phases that were identified in the previous chapter, because some of the shifts in the research programme and orientation of the CSHE were in response to developments and dynamics that were internal to either the organisation itself, or the university at which it is located.

5.2 Organisational History of the CSHE

The CSHE started its life at the beginning of 1992, although the agreement that formalised its establishment was signed in September 1991. Like the other EPUs that preceded it, the CSHE was established as a 'joint creation' of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) (UWC-EPU, 1991). It was mentioned in the

previous chapter that the NECC - which was a coalition of community-based and non-governmental organisations that campaigned under the slogan of 'People's Education for People's Power' – established the EPU in order for them to provide it with 'intellectual ammunition' in its broad-based struggles against apartheid education.

Although the CSHE was formally established as a joint project of the NECC and UWC, it was actually constituted through the partial merger of the Research on Education in South Africa (RESA), an education research project that was based at the University of Essex in England, and the Research and Training Project on Education in South Africa (RETPESA), an initiative of the democratic movement that was located at UWC (UWC-EPU, 1991). In this regard, the CSHE differed from the already existing EPUs at the Universities of Natal and the Witwatersrand in that it began part of its life outside of South Africa and came into being as a result of a merger of two already-existing entities.

Like its sister organisations, the CSHE was also formed in the crucible of the anti-apartheid struggle as a vehicle for the Mass Democratic Movement to begin focussing its attention on the exploration and development of alternative policy options, in anticipation of a post-apartheid education dispensation. Although one of the principles of the founding agreements of all the EPUs was that their founding partners - namely their host university and the NECC - would share the responsibility for raising their funds, the reality was that neither the universities nor the NECC was able to raise their share of funding for the EPUs' operating income, and, consequently, both founding partners increasingly had a declining influence in the affairs of the EPUs. The EPUs obtained the largest share of their operating income from foreign funding sources. For example, by 1994 the funding from foreign donors (as a proportion of all income) stood at 84.5% at the University of Natal's EPU, 57% at the University of the Witwatersrand's EPU, and 54.7% at the CSHE (Samoff, 1995).

Since its inception in 1992, the CSHE has had three Directors, namely Harold Wolpe (1992-1996), Saleem Badat (1999-2000), and George Subotzky (2001 - present); in addition, there were two Acting-Directors (Glen Fisher and Mignonne Breier) who took over the reigns following the death of Harold Wolpe in 1996. In 2002, the year the CSHE celebrated its 10th Anniversary, it changed its name to the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE)¹.

5.3 The Early Research Programme of the CSHE

The general objectives of the CSHE, as set out in its constitution, are to:

- conduct high-level theoretical and empirical research on alternative education policies which may contribute to the transformation of the higher education system in South Africa
- analyse higher education policy issues in relation to the existing institutional order and social structure and to strategies of economic and political reconstruction and development
- publish and disseminate research findings both in academic publications and in popular form
- train, particularly black, researchers in order to build and strengthen capacity in the field of higher education policy research and analysis

(Education Policy Unit, 1991: 5)

From its inception, the CSHE regarded its research orientation to be derived from a critique of the positions that were commonly held in political and educational circles in South Africa at the time. It saw itself as transcending the oppositional mode of research that was characteristic of the politics of the period leading up to the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 (UWC-EPU, 1991). The theoretical approach underpinning the research orientation of the CSHE sought to highlight the importance of analysing the relationship between education and the social-structural and institutional conditions of

South African society. Thus a part of the objective of the research programme was to examine

to what extent, if at all, and in what way, the alternative education policies contribute to the construction of an education system appropriate to, and supportive of, institutions and social structures of a democratic, unitary, and non-racial post-apartheid South Africa

(UWC-EPU, 1991: 10)

In this regard, the CSHE saw itself primarily as a research organisation that was focusing on the analysis of policy alternatives, rather than embarking on the development of concrete policy propositions for higher education transformation. Consequently, in the document outlining its research programme, the CSHE was at pains to emphasise this distinction, stating that:

it is not part of the role of the Unit to define and promote education policies other than through the assessment of policies proposed by the relevant actors in the field of education. [The] purpose [of the CSHE's research programme] is...to provide the democratic movement and, in the future also a democratic government, with knowledge which will be pertinent to policy formation

(UWC-EPU, 1991: 13)

The early research programme sought to balance two distinct orientations. The first– which was a consequence of the founding Director's own academic background and grounding in a particular theoretical and scholarly tradition – was the need to conduct research that was located within the broader field of critical/political sociology, in that it sought to examine and interrogate the effects of specific (higher education) policy reforms on the wider social order, especially the extent to which particular reforms either reinforced or reproduced social and institutional inequalities, or transformed the prevailing social order (UWC-EPU, 1991). It was also envisaged at the time that the research and scholarly output of the CSHE would contribute towards enhancing its academic reputation.

The second orientation of the CSHE research programme was towards contributing to the creation and development of a body of knowledge that would be of assistance to the democratic movement in its process of formulating policy options that would underpin the establishment of a transformed higher education system. In this regard, the CSHE saw its research programme as playing a role in influencing policy at the level of ideas, especially since the policy terrain was in a state of flux and was characterised by a high degree of uncertainty.

However, for reasons that had to do partly with a lack of capacity, as well as with the demands of working in a pressurised (political) environment, the CSHE had difficulty in adequately fulfilling this mandate. As a former Director of the CSHE has put it:

[the CSHE's research objective] was really about informing the policy development process of the ANC in the main, as the government-in-waiting. Within the [CSHE] there was also the notion of really just contributing to debates around higher education issues and building [a] culture of intellectual production in higher education, which is a very limited thing in South Africa. And then thirdly, I suppose, it was really contributing to scholarly debate and intellectual production, in terms of writings in journals and books, and so on.

I think the [CSHE] initially struggled to find that balance between consultancy/contract research – showing yourself to be relevant to the needs of transformation – and then on the other hand justifying your presence at an institution of higher education, in terms of contributing to scholarly debate.

This tension that the former Director is referring to was a constant theme throughout the early history of the CSHE. The CSHE struggled to strike a balance between being relevant to the goals of transformation – by playing an active role in providing intellectual and policy support to the democratic movement - on the one hand, and (through scholarly output) justifying its location within an institution of higher learning. The first challenge arose both

from its political responsibility to provide 'intellectual support and ammunition' to the democratic movement, as well as an expectation that, as a policy research unit with progressive credentials, it had a role to play in the unfolding policy development process. The second 'obligation', of course, arose from the fact that, as a research organisation located within a university – a university that was itself keen to improve its research output and profile – the CSHE was expected to contribute to scholarly research and the production of new knowledge.

This is a tension that confronted other EPU's and many of the other progressive policy research units (covering sectors such as health, urban planning, energy, etc.) that were set up in universities in the eighties. As Muller (2000) has argued, it is a tension whose resolution eluded the EPU's as they became paralysed trying to balance the two opposing demands and expectations between 'intellectual work' and 'reconstructive work'. For Muller such a balancing act

however desirable it may be, simply cannot be sustained [since]...the more that policy work drives toward planning and implementation, the less can it entertain doubts about its constitutive grounds

(Muller, 2000: 278)

The CSHE sought to resolve this tension by continuing to serve as a research resource to organisations of civil society [some of whom were not affiliated or associated with the democratic movement], in addition to developing its own research programme. In reflecting about this tension, the current Director of the CSHE has noted:

We were always, right from the beginning, always cautious about being labelled, or seen, as 'handmaidens' of [the new democratic] government. We also wanted to preserve our identity as independent researchers, and in that sense, (being) able to criticise, and reflect, on government [policy interventions]

Whilst insisting on maintaining its independence from the democratic movement, the CSHE could, however, not entirely stay aloof of the nascent policy development processes. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the establishment of the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) saw the EPU's getting more involved in research projects that had a more direct link to the formulation of policy proposals for a new education dispensation. Through its participation in policy development initiatives of the CEPD and other agencies, the CSHE was able to consolidate its reputation as an important higher education policy research unit within a very short period, so that by early 1994, it had become the main resource on higher education policy research and analysis for the ANC Education Department and the CEPD (Samoff, 1995).

Samoff (1995: 61) observes that the CSHE made "important contributions to the reconstruction of post-secondary education in South Africa" and that the "market assessment of the quality of the EPU's work is generally - though not entirely - positive". Samoff (1995) further notes that a number of influential people in the higher education sector at the time, including the Minister of Education, Prof Sibusiso Bhengu, the Department of Education's most senior civil servant, and the Chairman and Executive Director of the NCHE, all spoke highly of the CSHE's work.

A weakness of the CSHE during this period, which had implications for its research productivity, was the lack of a critical mass of senior and experienced researchers. As one of the central objectives of the CSHE was to recruit and develop a cadre of young black researchers, various training interventions were initiated - for example initially an 'in-service' training programme, and later an 'immersion' of trainee researchers in existing projects - but these were generally unsuccessful because of an absence of experienced researchers who would mentor the trainees. In this regard, a former Acting-Director of the CSHE has made the observation that:

there were real tensions in trying to build a unit that was, itself, going to be a kind of an exercise in transformation and empowerment, by bringing in young staff who didn't have the necessary qualifications and formal training and experience; and not the sort of people with the necessary [research] background.

We didn't say: "what do we do to become a really serious, high quality, professional, research outfit. How do we provide that high quality training and experience so that we bring back researchers and make them experts." At the end of the day, I think a disservice was done both to black staff who came in on that basis, because they didn't get the training they should have had, and the disservice was also done to the research agenda, in terms of the quality of the work that was produced.

A member of the Management Committee of the CSHE has also noted that:

the [CSHE] never really managed to attract top researchers which could really get it going. It had really good people. But what you needed to really lift [its] profile, in my view, were a number of top people. Research is very difficult. I understand the research culture very deeply as being pulled. You need models and mentors to develop a young research outfit. You can't push it with incentives. And I found - even when I was at the EPU at the University of the Witwatersrand - that it is extremely difficult to train people properly because of the nature of contract research and the deadlines. I had the view that - from 1990 - the universities had to do the training, and that research units had to recruit the best people. But they (EPUs) have persisted in taking in young people and trying to train them, and I think that's very difficult.

Much of the CSHE's research output between 1992 and 1997 can be divided into two broad types: the first was research with a strong theoretical/analytical bent, and whose objective was to help shape the early debates on the nature and direction of the South African higher education transformation project. Seminal among these were contributions on the future role of historically disadvantaged institutions in a post-apartheid higher education dispensation, on the policy framework and principles that ought to underpin a transformed higher education system, and on addressing the tension between the need for equity with the imperative of development. The second type of research was

largely of a descriptive kind, and was geared towards providing a more comprehensive picture of the higher education landscape, especially with regard to filling-in the large gaps in the data on the higher education system, for example on the historically disadvantaged institutions, or information that was not easily accessible from SAPSE². Most of this research fed into policy development initiatives such as the NCHE.

One of the key publications to come out of the CSHE in this period was a working paper with the title: *The Post-Secondary Education System: Towards Policy Formulation for Equality and Development*³, which sought to analyse and theorise the “problematic relationship” between equality and development (UWC-EPU, 1993: 5). The ‘equity and development’ problematic framed much of the early research programme of the CSHE, especially the major commissions it undertook for the CEPD⁴ and the Forum for the Vice-Chancellors of Historically Black Universities⁵.

Our discussion will now turn to the period after 1997, which saw the beginnings of a shift in the research orientation and programme of the CSHE.

5.4 The Changes in Research Orientation

There have been two shifts in the CSHE’s research focus and orientation since its inception in 1992. Both of these shifts unfolded over a period of five years, between 1997 and 2002. The first shift, which took place towards the end of what we referred to in the previous chapter as the ‘third phase of policy development (1995-1999)’, reflected a change of focus for the CSHE research from its concern with macro-level policy analysis and development, to an examination of the effects of national policy at the institutional level. Following the promulgation of the higher education framework with the passing of the White Paper on Higher Education Transformation and the Higher Education Act in 1997, the CSHE recognised that the changing higher education legislative environment required it to

take up the challenge represented by the shift from policy formation to policy implementation, both in terms of contributing to the development of implementation frameworks and strategies, and developing the capacities pertinent for this new work

(UWC-EPU, 1999: 14)

The current Director of the CSHE has also commented as follows in this regard:

I think that there was an initial emphasis on research for policy - and in my reading particularly – on building the whole macro-framework of education policy, leading up to that period around 1996/7; and once the NCHE had done its work, the White Paper, and so on... from then on the focus [shifted to] other kinds or elements of policymaking and the [higher education] change process, and I think particularly looking a little more towards institutional-level change and the range of responses of institutions to the macro-policy framework. A number of our projects are looking at that level.

Perhaps as a reflection of the shift at the macro-policy level, the CSHE conducted two projects for the new Department of Education in this period. The first project, which was undertaken in 1999, focused on international student and staff mobility into South Africa, and also examined academic linkages between South African higher education institutions and higher education and research institutions in Africa⁶. The objectives of the research project were to examine and determine the flows of students and staff from other parts of Africa into the South African higher education system, and the extent of academic collaborations and linkages between South African institutions and their counterparts on the continent. A further objective was to examine these trends in the light of relevant policy options regarding access, equity, and human resource development in the southern African region. The report was submitted to the Department of Education in November 1999.

The second commissioned project was undertaken in 2000, and its main objective was to provide an overview of the then nascent private higher

education sector in South Africa, in particular with reference to its size, and the nature of its programmes and qualification offerings. The other objectives of the project were to:

- examine international trends with a view to drawing out lessons for South Africa and to identifying the likely future direction of private higher education in South Africa
- analyse the prevailing local conditions that fostered the proliferation of private higher education institutions in South Africa
- identify the likely impact and potential contribution of the private higher education sector to the higher education system as a whole, both as a complementary partner, or a threat, within the overall development of human resources in South Africa; and
- highlight key policy considerations for the Department of Education to consider

(Mabizela, *et al*, 2000)

The second shift with respect to the CSHE's research orientation manifested itself as a conscious attempt to institutionalise higher education studies as a scholarly endeavour. This has been characterised as a shift away from a "consultancy-driven, Mode-2 oriented research, at the development/policy periphery", towards the "disciplinary heartland of the academy" (CSHE, 2003: 6). According to Subotzky (2002), the consultancy-driven research had given rise to a "theoretically thin" research that did not add to the stock of scholarship on higher education studies. This shift - which, in Terenzini's (1996) terms is seen as a displacement of the scholarship of application with the scholarship of discovery and integration – is not indicative of an embracing of (higher education) scholarship for its own sake, but would be a project that retains an explicitly political and transformative agenda. As the Director of the CSHE puts it:

in forging our new identity as a centre, we've been clear that we don't want to model ourselves on some of the American centres which we would

distinguish ourselves from in terms of a political agenda... of transformation
and upholding the values underpinning the new democracy

Furthermore, this second shift was not only in response to the changes in the broader policy climate, but also a reflection of the changes in the research orientations of those leadership within the CSHE. Again, in the words of the current Director:

I think it's true to say that Harold Wolpe, as the founding Director, was very steeped in political economy and development economics, and that kind of thing, but he wasn't actually a higher education scholar, so he wasn't an educationist in that sense; that was not his disciplinary background.

I think that under [Saleem Badat, the second Director] some of these strategic shifts began to happen. So I think he did that, you know the whole idea of higher education studies and this notion of institutionalisation [of higher education studies] was his initiative, it got borne with him, as it were.

There is, however, a different reading of these shifts (which is really my own interpretation as a former 'insider'⁷), which would characterise them as a response to, or a culmination of, key developments that were internal to the CSHE. The first development followed the sudden death of Harold Wolpe (the founding director of the CSHE) in early 1996, which precipitated the appointment of a Working Group by the UWC Senate Academic Planning Committee to consider the future of the CSHE. There were also other reasons that were given by the Academic Planning Committee for the enquiry, and these were that:

- the demise of the NECC – which, with UWC, was a founding partner of the CSHE - invalidated the constitutional basis of the CSHE
- it was an anomaly that a major research unit such as the CSHE was operating outside of the academic and faculty structures of the university

- the political and higher education context that had changed since the establishment of the CSHE in 1991 required an appraisal of its founding objectives

(UWC-EPU, 1999: 11)

The main recommendation of the Working Group was that the CSHE should be located within the university's Faculty of Education, and become directly involved in the teaching programme of the Faculty. While the identity of the CSHE as "fundamentally a research unit" that would continue to conduct policy research in higher education was recognised, the Working Group also emphasised that the CSHE would have to develop a programme of "scholarly research" (UWC-EPU, 1999: 12). The recommendations of the Senate Working Group were subsequently endorsed by the University Council.

Following the Council decision, the CSHE revised its organisational objectives to give expression to the Senate Working Group's recommendations. The following two goals were thus added to its constitution:

- to contribute to the institutionalisation of the academic fields of education policy studies and higher education studies through collaboration and co-operation with other academic and research organisations and institutions; and
- to contribute to the education and training of students, particularly from historically disadvantaged social backgrounds, in the fields of education policy studies and higher education studies

(UWC-EPU, 1999: 13)

It must also be remembered that for a period of three years, from 1996 to 1999, the CSHE was unable to fill the Director's post following the death of Harold Wolpe. This inability to fill the directorship at the very time that it was facing the challenges both internally and externally created considerable uncertainty within the CSHE regarding its future. It is therefore possible to

interpret the shifts referred to earlier as having been precipitated not so much by a response to changes in the external (policy) environment, but by internal dynamics. So the shift from 'research for' to 'research of' policy – in other words, the decision to focus on higher education policy as a scholarly endeavour – can be read as flowing directly from the Senate's decision. The same reading would extend to the establishment of the Masters programme in Policy Analysis, Leadership and Management - a joint initiative with the Faculty of Education - which can be seen as another development that gave effect to the Senate's recommendation.

A more recent development that has also reinforced the second shift was a five-year research and organisational development grant that was obtained by the CSHE - as part of a nation-wide consortium of policy research units - to undertake long-term critical research in higher education. This grant, according to the CSHE, would free its researchers from the "consultancy treadmill", allowing it to realise its vision of becoming "a recognised centre of critical scholarship in the field of higher education policy studies" (CSHE, 2003: 9).

Furthermore, the immersion of the CSHE research within the field of higher education policy studies would, according to the current Director, unshackle it from its national/domestic moorings, thereby gaining it a wider audience, such that:

somebody sitting in Bulgaria or at the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (in the Netherlands) will find our work interesting, since it will not be bounded by the current, or narrow, national dimension

5.5 The Current Research and Teaching Programme

The previous section has discussed some of the shifts in the research orientation of the CSHE, and in so doing, touched on aspects of the current research being undertaken. According to the Director, the mode of

knowledge production varies from what could generally be described as strategic research, towards research that is more scholarly, some of which would still retain a policy emphasis. He has described his understanding of strategic research as one that:

relates to particular kinds of longer term transformations and applications, so in that sense one could broadly locate research, both for, and of, policy. It has some kind of an instrumental, or external, purpose to it

5.5.1 Research Clusters and Projects

There are four thematic clusters in the current research programme of the CSHE, and these are on:

1. Access, equity and inclusion
2. Knowledge production, knowledge application, and ICT
3. Institutional culture and higher education change
4. Special topical issues

Some of the research projects that fall into these broad themes are the following:

Access, Equity and Inclusion

- The Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South African Higher Education
- Inclusive Education: Ensuring Equitable Access and Success among Students with Disabilities
- Deracialising the Academic Heartland: Case Studies of Five Higher Education Institutions

Knowledge, Knowledge Application and ICT

- The Contribution of Higher Education Development: Investigating Modes of Knowledge Production and Developing Appropriate Research Capacity-Building Models
- The Innovative Application of ICTs in Higher Education
- A Survey of Innovation in African Higher Education

Higher Education Change

- Reconfiguring the Higher Education Institutional Landscape
- Case Studies of Strategic Management in Higher Education Institutions
- Improving Student Access and Success through Enhanced Leadership and Management in Higher Education

Topical Issues

- Staff Retention and Remuneration Levels at South African Universities and Technikons
- Operationalising Institutional Redress in South African Higher Education
- The Dynamics of Aid to Education and Training in Africa

5.5.2 The Masters Programme in Higher Education Studies

In January 2002 the CSHE, in conjunction with the Faculty of Education at UWC, launched a Masters degree programme in Higher Education Studies: Policy Analysis, Leadership and Management (PALM). The objective of the degree programme is to equip its participants with an academically-based understanding of the changing context of higher education (CSHE Annual Report, 2003). The programme has received considerable funding from the Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations. The programme - which registered 18 students in its first year of operation (2002), some of whom were

in the post-graduate diploma stream – has had a number of visiting lecturers from neighbouring institutions as well as prominent international scholars.

5.5.3 *Staffing and Capacity Building*

In 2003, the CSHE had a staff complement of 15 members, 10 of whom were researchers, and the rest administrative staff. Four of the staff members had PhDs, and three were registered PhD candidates.

Although the development of capacity in higher education policy research remains one of the central objectives of the CSHE's mission, a number of training interventions and programmes that were initiated over the years have not been successful. An internship programme that was partially funded by the National Research Foundation has been discontinued, although it is not clear what the reasons for the discontinuance are (CSHE Annual Report, 2002). A strategy that is being considered is to re-establish the internship programme – possibly with recruits from the PALM Masters programme - once the CSHE has developed sufficient research expertise at the senior level. There also plans to develop an exchange programme (with international research centres) for its staff.

This chapter has provided an historical overview of the CSHE's research programme, and highlighted some of the challenges that it has faced since its inception, as well as some of the key shifts in its research orientation. The chapter that follows will examine the issues related to the utilisation of the CSHE's research in the higher education policy development process.

¹ Although the CSHE changed its name to the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) in 2002, for the purpose of consistency we will use CSHE throughout this thesis.

² The South African Post Secondary Education (SAPSE) system was the higher education information system of the old Department of National Education.

- ³ Badat, S., Barends, Z., & Wolpe, H. (1993) *The Post-Secondary Education System: Towards Policy Formulation for Equality and Development*.
- ⁴ Education Policy Unit (1994) *Draft Policy Proposals for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Post-Secondary Education in South Africa*.
- ⁵ Badat, S., Fisher, G., Wolpe, H. et al (1994) *Differentiation and Disadvantage: The Historically Black Universities in South Africa*. EPU Research Report.
- ⁶ UWC-EPU (1999) *International students and staff at higher education institutions in South Africa and academic linkages between local institutions and higher education and research institutions on the African continent*.
- ⁷ I worked as a researcher at the CSHE from its inception in 1992 until 1997.

Chapter Six

The Dynamics of the Utilisation of Research

6.1 Introduction

The special circumstances regarding the establishment of the CSHE as a joint project of the University of the Western Cape and the National Education Co-ordinating Committee brought with it a number of contending responsibilities and expectations. As pointed out in the preceding chapter, one of the tensions that the CSHE had to balance was the need to contribute to the transformation of higher education by providing support to the nascent policy development process, whilst also producing scholarly research for the emerging field of higher education studies. There was also the added expectation that the CSHE would help inculcate a research culture at the University of the Western Cape, being located as it was at a historically disadvantaged institution, one of whose main challenges at the time was to improve its research output.

At the level of research utilisation, this tension also played itself out as a need for the research products of the CSHE to find 'use' within the policy development process on the one hand, whilst also making a contribution to the generation of ideas and new knowledge, the latter to be achieved through publications in scholarly journals. A former Director of the CSHE has captured the challenges arising from these responsibilities as follows:

I think right from the outset the work of the [CSHE] was meant to be addressing multiple audiences, and its utilisation was meant to be for different kinds of purposes. So if you look at the [CSHE] itself it had a notion of really contributing to a transformation process, and in the early nineties this was really about informing the policy development process of the ANC in the main, as the government-in-waiting. Within the [CSHE] there was also the notion of really just contributing to debates around higher education issues and building that kind of culture of intellectual production in higher education, which is a very limited thing in South Africa.

The above quotation is apposite because it allows us to 'unpack' the various notions or understandings of the intended 'uses' of the research output of the CSHE. The three that are immediately apparent are the following:

- Use as contribution to policy development: "...*informing the policy development process...*"
- Use as contribution to scholarship/intellectual enterprise: "...*building... [a] culture of intellectual production in higher education...*"
- Use as generation of ideas: "...*contributing to debates...*"

In the discussion that follows we will examine the extent to which the CSHE managed to address each of these various 'uses' of research.

6.2 Utilisation as input into policymaking

In the chapter on the review of the literature we highlighted the complex nature of the relationship between the production of knowledge and its utilisation in policymaking. We also discussed two of the main theories that attempt to explain this relationship, namely Caplan's (1977; 1979) 'two communities' theory, as well as Weiss' (1977, 1979, 1980) enlightenment model of knowledge utilisation. In the interviews that were conducted for this study, the respondents were asked to express their views on the extent to which the research produced by the CSHE was of 'use' in policymaking. We will examine these responses in order to see if these shed any light on the understanding of this relationship in South Africa.

A good starting point for engaging with these issues is to examine the views of the government representatives who commission research. We were able to establish from the Department of Education (DoE) as well as with the current Director of the CSHE that there have been only two commissioned

projects awarded to the CSHE by the Higher Education Branch of the DoE since 1997, both of which we have outlined in the previous chapter.

The objective of the first project, which was completed in 1999, was to examine and determine the flows of students and staff from other parts of Africa into the South African higher education system, and the extent of academic collaborations and linkages between South African institutions and their counterparts on the continent. Of policy relevance in this project was its aim to “inform the construction of a concrete proposal by the Department of Education with regard to the options that are available to give effect to the offer of the Minister to make the South African higher education “infrastructure available to other countries in Africa as part of a regional exchange programme.”¹

The second project sought to provide an overview of the private higher education sector, in particular with reference to its size, and the nature of its programmes and qualification offerings. The project also had as one of its objectives the need to identify the likely impact of the growth of private higher education on the higher education system as a whole, and to highlight the policy implications of such an outcome for the system (Mabizela *et al*, 2000). Our purpose here is not to discuss the details of the two projects but to draw out some of the issues relating to utilisation arising from these commissions and other interactions that the CSHE has had with the DoE.

From the interviews conducted with the DoE officials, it seems that the way things turned out in relation to both commissions eroded their confidence in the ability of the CSHE to assist the DoE in its work. There is a perception within the Higher Education Branch that the CSHE had shown poor supervisory oversight over the researchers who conducted projects mentioned above. This – according to the officials that were interviewed - led to the submission of research reports that fell far short of addressing the (policy) concerns of the Department, and betrayed a lack of understanding of

the nuances of policymaking. In trying to explain the problem they have had in their dealings not only with the CSHE, but with other commissioned researchers as well, a Chief Director within the Higher Education Branch of the DoE has stated that:

The dilemma is that the person who does consultancy work for you, coming from the outside, more often than not does not have the nuanced understanding, does not have the depth, that your job actually gives you in terms of studying the problem. So you more often than not, receive reports which... yes are useful, but you sometimes feel that: "Gee, I wish we would have had time to drill further down because, actually, I'm being told something that I already know."

I suspect it comes back to the fact that as the Department matures and tries to ensure that it itself is a knowledge organisation, [in that] it applies intellectual rigour as far as possible in terms of what it does, its expectation of commissioned work also goes up. Because we then say: "Tell us something we don't know. Don't tell [us] something that [we] already know."

The view expressed above – as far as the respondent is concerned - highlights the differences in the 'operating paradigms' between the researchers and the policymakers (Kogan & Henkel, 2000). It also reinforces the classic response as to why social research has been found wanting by policymakers, namely that researchers have a poor comprehension of the 'realities' of the policymaking process. It also has shades of the 'two worlds' thesis of the two communities theory. A further reflection of the prevalence of the two communities thesis is provided by Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education², who poses the question:

Can academics in general, and this includes researchers in policy units, ... only take policy research so far, and cannot take it beyond a certain point? There's something that's called imagination, intuition, [an] ability to [understand] a political situation strategically, a sense of what will work, and what won't work, and so on – that is lacking amongst the [work] we commission.

Perhaps - to be fair to those that we commission - they do not operate in this realm, and maybe they should not operate in this realm. They can only take it to a certain distance, and put forward tentative ideas forward, and perhaps

they do the best they can do when they put forward those proposals and recommendations. But especially at that level, it doesn't feel useful at all.

And that's especially where we have to do a lot of work, because really, at the end of the day, [even] a brilliant analysis [is not of much use]...because, you know, the Minister will say: "This is really good stuff but where's the proposals, where's the recommendations?" That's what we find we have to do a lot of work around.

Let's just say I've seen too much work that has not helped in that really important arena of the policy proposals and the recommendations; perhaps it has to do with the fact that it's a different arena of work altogether which, maybe, most academic scholars cannot do.

This somewhat long quotation seems to capture the sentiment in official circles with regard to the utility of much of policy research in South Africa. For Chief Executive Officer of the CHE, the explanation for this state of affairs is to be found in the failure of the higher education research/academic community to come to grips with the changed policy environment. According to him:

It may well be that research institutions have not read the shifts, and have not seen the signals that we are going to be moving from a concern with macro/big policy statements and visions towards much more concern about how the hell do we make these things work now, you know.

He further attributes this inability or failure of the research community to produce 'useful' research to the orientation of much of the social research that was produced in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. As we have mentioned in Chapter 4, much of this research was steeped in 'critique' mode. Thus for the Chief Executive Officer of the CHE:

...maybe a weakness in this overall [research] enterprise is in terms of where we come from, and what we have been schooled in, [and] that is critique. And maybe it takes a bit more time and it's more difficult to get practice in a different mode of working, which, you know, is not about abandoning being critical; it's about simultaneously being reconstructive and critical... I suspect that research institutions and individuals have to ask themselves to what

extent they have read the context sufficiently, and what it has meant for their work.

This is a view that is shared by a Chief Director in the DoE, who has stated that

I wouldn't say that we find the research community wanting; I'm just simply saying that they may not have changed their mindset from the early oppositional period. I think what we have both learnt is the need for us to have a shared understanding of what it is that we are trying to do; and secondly, to ensure that there is the greatest amount of intellectual rigour in everything that we do, and to push each other as hard as we can intellectually to get the best product for both of us. No research organisation worth its salt would want to be associated with a shoddy product. Nobody. And neither do the civil servants want a shoddy product.

The views reflected by these two quotations are, of course, not new, as they echo sentiments that were made by Taylor (1992) more than ten years previously. In an address he gave to a conference of the EPU's in 1992, Taylor pointed out that one of the key impediments to the impact of the EPU's' research output on policy outcomes had to do with what he referred to as the 'orientation' of its research, which he saw as being steeped in the mode of academic critique and was, consequently, of little use to policy actors. Both Taylor's diagnosis of the problem resonates with Terenzini's characterisation of the shortcomings of higher education research in the US. For Terenzini (1996), the gulf between higher education research and higher education policymaking was a direct consequence of higher education research gravitating towards the social science disciplines, a development that resulted in its obsession with theory and method, to the extent that it became inaccessible to practitioners and policymakers.

Another shortcoming that was highlighted by Taylor (1992) in his address, which is an extension of the criticism made above, was that most of the research that was carried out by the EPU's (in the first and second phases of

policy development) lacked empirical grounding. Samoff (1995), in his evaluation report on the CSHE, also highlights the relative absence of “sustained empirical research and of innovative approaches to data analysis” as one of the major weaknesses of the research programme of the CSHE.

A former Acting-Director of the CSHE has also underscored Samoff’s (1995) and Taylor’s (1992) assessment by commenting that:

the [CSHE] at that point (1992 to 1996) wasn’t in any position to put any hard research data or analysis on the table, as a way of influencing policy. It was really about engaging [the ANC as government-in-waiting] at the level of ideas, engaging the political debates and issues and dealing, to the extent that it addressed higher education at all, with, I suppose, the more theoretical and descriptive literatures. So where I think we were all thin as a country - and the [CSHE] was part of that - was being empirically weak. We had very little hard research; we were going on our political instincts, on our best judgments, on our theoretical concerns and issues, and so forth.

There have also been some strong views that have been expressed with regard to the diminished role that the CSHE has played in the higher education policy arena since 1999, which, as we mentioned in Chapter 4, signalled the commencement of the focus on policy implementation. Indicative of this view are the remarks made by the Chief Executive Officer of the CHE who, in reflecting on the research output of the CSHE over the past few years, has indicated that:

the [CSHE] ... hasn’t produced much... that has asked or propelled anyone to sit up and take notice, whether in the CHE, or in the Ministry... For the last few years I have not seen anything, I have not read anything, I have not been highly persuaded, or changed my ideas about anything that the [CSHE] has produced. And very little [of what] has ever entered into any of the policy advice or the work we’ve done has quoted or referenced the [CSHE]. Perhaps it’s a particular moment that they’re in, perhaps their focus has shifted, I don’t know. But there’s very little that I have seen, in the last few years, that has come out from the [CSHE].

The view from within the Department of Education seems even less complimentary, if the remarks made by a Chief Director in the Higher Education Branch³, are anything to go by:

the [CSHE] ... may as well not exist. I mean, when I want something I don't think: "[CSHE]"; it doesn't come to mind. I mean even in terms of the [higher education] restructuring process, where was the [CSHE]?

However, underlying this quote is an instrumentalist notion of research, in the sense that the CSHE is seen as being of relevance only insofar as it can assist, or play a role, in helping the DoE address the "consequential problems" of the day, as it has defined them. According to the same official from the DoE, the CSHE lacks the expertise in the areas that his Directorate requires assistance in. This has led the DoE to rely increasingly on overseas experts - especially from the UK and Australia - to assist it in developing new policy, most notably the new funding formula. According to the official:

I don't think the CSHE has got the capacity to do the work we require. The work that my section has commissioned outside has been very technical work around the funding formula - which needs very specialised, technical, skills - in fact, there are very few people with those skills in the country.

The challenge now facing the Ministry of Education – as articulated by a senior official within the Higher Education Branch - is to translate the higher education policy framework into concrete interventions which have to be driven internally by the Department of Education. This has given rise to a new *modus operandi* with regard to the internal functioning of the Department of Education, whereby it has identified a number of people from higher education institutions with the relevant expertise who will work within the Department. These experts are now being hired as technical consultants or managers of projects that the Department undertakes internally, and some have been seconded from their institutions for extended periods. Some of the work that these experts have been recruited for is in areas such as the institutional mergers, or in the development of post-National Plan policy initiatives such as the National Higher Education Information and Applications Service.

Another official within the Department has explained to me that a part of the reason for this new *modus operandi* could be interpreted as a desire to have more control of the policy implementation process. According to him, there is a feeling within the DoE that giving work out to researchers - who then work independently of the DoE's oversight structures – may result in the DoE losing control of the policy implementation process.

However, one has to be careful not to attribute a view that is emanating from a particular section of the bureaucracy to being a perspective that is representative of the whole bureaucracy. This may be a function of the ways in which the different sections of the bureaucracy interact with the research community or higher education stakeholders in general. For example, another senior official of the Department of Education seems more prepared to see a role for the EPU's in helping the department achieve its mandate:

We also want to build relationships, particularly with the EPU's, because we believe that as we grow, they ought to grow. And they must be the source and our mirrors, to be able to critique us in terms of what we do, and not just merely do abstract work on the outside and then say that is what we ought to do.

We use knowledge towards achieving our goals, which is, principally, to steer, to regulate, to formulate policy and laws, and all those other things, and to provide a service...But for you to be able to use it, you have to have a reasonable foundation to be able to know what you are receiving, and what you are reading.

Interestingly, the Head of the Higher Education Branch in the Department of Education, has expressed a view that seems to indicate a recognition of the 'percolating' nature of social or policy research:

I think that some form of investigation has informed or underpinned all the major policy initiatives [of the Department of Education]; whether you want to define it strictly as research is another question.

I'm pretty sure ... that there must be stuff that we draw on, but I can't think of it off-hand now. Often it may not be directly to inform what we might be doing at [a particular] time, but I've often drawn on stuff in terms of speech-writing, then drawn on stuff that informs other work in turn...Clearly there's never enough time to filter everything that comes through, and then drill down. Often it remains at a fairly superficial level. You know it's there, until you need it and then you drill down...

I pick up on stuff through other networks like COHORT⁴, where I first picked up on the Mouton work (on the ageing academic workforce); then seminars; international stuff I pick up through THES (Times Higher Education Supplement), and through internet sources

This corroborates Weiss' (1977) notion of the enlightenment function of social research, whose "undirected seepage" into the policy domain is difficult to measure and assess since its 'impact' is so gradual, and so subtle, as to be barely discernible. It also confirms Weiss' (1979) notion of the 'interactive' use of research, where policymakers seek out policy-relevant information, which may not be solely derived from social science research.

Another explanation that has been provided for the 'non-use' of the CSHE's research in policymaking – especially in the third phase of the policy development process (1994-1999) - has to do with the nature of the policy agenda at the time. From this perspective, the early higher education transformation agenda was mainly about the macro-issues of system change, much of which was at the ideological and symbolic policy level. Consequently, there was little input for research since what was driving the policymaking process was a need for consensus at the political level. As a former Acting-Director of the CSHE has put it:

...the decision to - in [the Minister of Education's] terms - 'reconfigure the apartheid landscape', that's a political decision, that's not a research decision. I think what's been difficult in higher education is that [the transformation process] is so transparently a political agenda, that it's almost impossible to make the case on the basis of data. My sense of it is that in higher education the issues that people have been grappling with have been large issues, and

the tools that have been used have been large, blunt, instruments. They've been about system restructuring, about mergers, and all that stuff. And to be honest, I think that the point of departure for that has nothing to do with research; those are political decisions, and in saying that, I'm not suggesting that those decisions are illegitimate. I think they are, necessarily, political decisions.

The understanding of the political nature of the policy process in South Africa that underlies the above quotation is not be very far from Weiss' (1979) notion of the political use of research, where knowledge is used to legitimise previously arrived-at decisions. In this instance, research is 'successful' or is 'useful' only insofar as it "accords with the views [and intelligent wisdom] of those in power" (Kogan & Henkel, 2000, 34). Under these circumstances the research that is produced to make interventions at the macro-policy level has to wait for the political agenda to move in its favour if it is to have any chance of being 'taken up' (Kogan & Henkel, 2000).

There is also a view that seems to attribute the non- or under-utilisation of social science research in the public policy domain to a creeping 'anti-intellectualism' in government circles, which manifests itself in the increasingly instrumentalist approach to policymaking. In this regard, the current Director of the CSHE has commented that:

There has been a tendency towards anti-intellectualism. What's happened in South Africa is that you have this phenomenon of ex-academics and ex-activists going into government, and then experiencing something of a disjuncture with those old identities, and thinking more bureaucratically, as it were... It manifests itself in a kind of a disdain for the academic – "we don't need these big codes and these big academic preoccupations, we need something much more focused, and useful".

For others, though, the issue is not 'anti-intellectualism' *per se*, but a nonetheless equally pernicious development - which a former Acting-Director of the CSHE has referred to as a "particular philosophy" or culture of

governing – that tends to be dismissive of the role of research in addressing the challenges of government. As he puts it:

I think also, there is a worrying culture in the Department of Education, that somehow because [they] are in government, [they] carry some kind of mandate, and therefore ultimately must be right; and that research, in a sense, is just an inconvenience, or a distraction. That [they] know best. I wouldn't necessarily call that anti-intellectualism; I think that there's a particular philosophy here about the role of government, and the particular role and status of civil servants in the national [transformation] project, that I find worrying from the point of view of both intellectual honesty and openness, and worrying politically as well.

I think at a different level there may be some impatience with research that is self-important and doesn't understand the realities of government, and betrays no understanding of the challenges and complexities of governing. There's clearly some irritation with the way that researchers present some special claims about what the impact [their research] is likely to have, sometimes.

However, according to the Head of the Higher Education Branch in the DoE, these reservations are misplaced, since it is the rigour, and not the orientation of the research, that will determine its utility (within the policy process).

I'm sure that there's a role for independent research which is different to the kind of policy research that we might commission, or the CHE might commission, or that SAUVCA might commission. However, I think that whether that research proves to be, in the medium to long-term, really useful to people in the field, will depend so much on the rigour with which it is conducted.

In this regard, she is seemingly contradicting one of her senior officials, whose view and understanding of the relationship between research and policymaking is probably more located within the engineering, or problem-solving, model of the utilisation of research. We will now discuss another perspective that has emerged from the interviews with regard to the utility of the CSHE research, namely its contribution to higher education scholarship.

6.3 Utilisation as contribution to Scholarship/Intellectual Domain

The CSHE has, since its inception, identified as one of its main objectives the production of knowledge that will contribute to the development of higher education as a field of academic study. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this objective became more prominent following the Senate Academic Planning Committee Working Group's recommendations on the future of the CSHE. So after its flirtation with undertaking research that would contribute directly to policy, a decision was reached in 2002 that the CSHE would retreat to the academy.

This move towards the “disciplinary heartland of the academy” – to use Clark's (1998) terms – was seen as an important step in realising the CSHE's objective of becoming a “recognised centre of critical scholarship in the field of higher education policy studies” (CHSE, 2002: 6). This is a challenge that the current Director is well aware of:

in terms of publications output there's always been a struggle. We know that we should be taking more of the findings of our project work and writing them up [in refereed journals]. That's been hard, it's always hard - the finding of the time to do that.... people are not succeeding to do that – to finish a big project and say, well, it's done for, and now let me write it into an article.

This is a view shared by a member of the Management Committee of the CSHE, whose feeling is that the Centre has not played as influential a role as it could in the (higher education) intellectual/academic domain, because of its inability to translate its research output into journal articles:

I've tried to argue that they should write up their reports and get peer commentary. At the moment, what happens with a lot of NGO research is that it ends up in a report and doesn't enter the knowledge mainstream. So a) it is never evaluated by peers, and b) it doesn't contribute to discernible knowledge accumulation. So it is marketised. It becomes a service, and its utility is exhausted in its delivery, it never functions as a knowledge object by being critiqued, circulated, and accumulated. So you undercut your own

value if you don't have a certain level of acceding to the demands of the knowledge community.

Our final discussion in this chapter will turn to a third 'use' that has been identified in the interviews, namely that of its contribution to ideas.

6.4 Utilisation as generation of ideas/contribution to debates

There seems to be a close affinity between the notion of the use of research to contribute to the generation of ideas and/or to influence debates - which largely occurs in the realm of public or academic discourse - and the enlightenment function of research, which Weiss (1979) uses to refer to knowledge or research utilisation within the policymaking sphere. The similarity lies in the fact that, on both accounts, the research diffuses over time from one to sphere the other, whether through its framing of the terms of a particular debate, or how it changes the way in which government officials talk about, or get to understand, a particular problem.

From the interviews that were conducted, there is broad consensus that the CSHE played a significant role in the first and second phases of the policy development process (cf. Chapter Four), especially in contributing to the debates of the NEPI and NCHE processes. A former Acting-Director of the CSHE had this to say in this regard:

I think the CSHE – notwithstanding my criticism about the lack of hard research – was playing a very important role at the very formative and early stage [of policy development] ...I think in terms of influencing discourse, the language that was being used, the concepts that were being worked with, problematising some of the issues around equity and development – those sorts of things – I think the CSHE had quite an important influence, [though] not only directly traceable and measurable, but an important influence on the kind of general debates and the issues being discussed.

So I think that the fingerprints of the CSHE can be found all over the pages of the NCHE report, but it would also be a mistake to kind of attribute that, in

any simple way, to Harold and the CSHE, because there were other important contributions from people like Jon File, and so forth.

To summarise our discussion, what has emerged from our analysis of the interviews is that, firstly, there was a multiplicity of expectations of the CSHE's research – arising from its history and institutional location - which ranged from a need to contribute to the broader transformation process, to the expectation that it would help facilitate a culture of scholarship at a historically disadvantaged institution. That it was not able to achieve some of these expectations is hardly surprising, given the obstacles it encountered – for example its inability to recruit researchers of a high calibre – as well as the political nature of the policy development process at the time. There is however, widespread recognition of the role that the CSHE played in shaping the early debates in higher education, in particular during the period leading up to the establishment of the (NCHE).

¹ UWC-EPU (1999b), p 13.

² The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is a statutory body that has been established in terms of the higher education legislation to provide independent, strategic advice to the Minister of Education on matters relating to the transformation of higher education.

³ This division, which was responsible for developing the National Plan on Higher Education, also has oversight for HEMIS (the higher education management information system) as well as the allocation of funding to higher education institutions.

⁴ This is the forum of the presidents of science councils as well the chief executives of statutory bodies (e.g. CHE) and other national stakeholder structures such as SAUVCA.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the question of knowledge utilisation in higher education policymaking in South Africa, using the CSHE as a case study. From the review of the literature it was shown that there are various models that explain the nature of policymaking, which are distinguishable by the stage of the policy process that they seek to emphasise as being pivotal in policymaking. It was also argued that, although most of these models were developed to analyse the policymaking process within the context of mature democracies, they nonetheless raise important issues for developing countries like South Africa.

The discussion of the literature on knowledge utilisation highlighted the complex nature of the relationship between the production of knowledge and its utilisation in policymaking. Two theories that explain the relationship between research and its utilisation in policymaking were discussed. Caplan's (1977; 1979) 'two communities' theory explains the non-utilisation of research in policymaking on the basis of a "cultural gap" that exists between researchers and policymakers, which is a consequence of the two worlds – in terms of values, language, and reward systems – that the two communities inhabit. Weiss' (1977; 1979; 1980) enlightenment model, on the other hand, sees the relationship between knowledge and its use in public policy interventions as much more indeterminate, especially if one's point of departure is not the instrumental understanding of 'use'.

We also established that the 'two communities' theory features prominently in the literature on the utilisation of higher education research, even though this is subsumed under the broader debates on the nature and purpose of higher education research. For example, the debate in the US is framed in terms of the dilemma that higher education research faced as it strived to become a

recognised field of study of the social sciences within its own canons and methods of enquiry on the one hand, and – on the other hand - Terenzini's (1996) insistence that, as an applied field of study, the foremost agenda of higher education research should be the resolution of higher education's 'consequential problems'.

We began our discussion of the South African higher education policy context with an overview of the process of policy development, especially in the post-1990 period. It was suggested that a better way to understand the evolution of higher education policy development in South Africa is to see it as having gone through four phases, each of which marked a significant turning point within higher education itself, as well as in the broader political context. The process of the policy development, and in particular the role of higher education research in it, was shown as one that was largely driven by political and ideological imperatives.

The discussion of the dynamics of knowledge utilisation was preceded by a descriptive account of the history of the CSHE, which was characterised by its struggle to address a number of demands and expectations, namely to:

- provide research and intellectual support to the ANC and the democratic movement in general
- develop a body of scholarship in the nascent field of higher education studies
- develop a culture of research and scholarship at a historically disadvantaged institution
- nurture and train a cadre of young black researchers

In this regard, the twin challenges facing the EPU and other progressive academics in general, namely that of engaging in a 'reconstructive' agenda on the one hand, while undertaking intellectual/scientific work on the other hand

and, in the case of the CSHE, contributing to the development of the nascent field of higher education studies as well, was an ongoing dilemma. It was to prove to be a tension which, as Müller (2000) suggests, the progressive education community was never able to balance successfully.

We further discussed how the CSHE's attempts to address these sometimes competing – and even contradictory - challenges were hamstrung by a confluence of factors. The first was the sheer enormity of the task of trying to address the above-mentioned objectives almost simultaneously – which was primarily not of the CSHE's making but arose from the multiplicity of demands that came from various quarters – and which were accentuated by the CSHE's inability to recruit experienced researchers. Another factor was that these demands were placed on a research centre that was venturing into a fairly new area of scholarly endeavour in South Africa, a field of study in which most of the CSHE's researchers, including its founding director, did not possess high-level expertise. This partly accounted for the orientation of its work towards critique, something which was a feature of the scholarship emanating from the progressive academic community at the time.

Another factor that we highlighted were the shifts in focus in the CSHE's research programme, which were in response as much to developments that were internal to UWC (the Senate Academic Planning Committee's recommendations), as they were to the changes in the broader higher education policy context (the shift from developing frameworks to addressing issues of delivery). The shifts that were brought about by dynamics that were internal to UWC in particular, meant that an additional 'burden' – that of partaking in the teaching programme of the Faculty – was placed on the CSHE's already overloaded agenda. Finally, the CSHE also had to contend with a period of uncertainty arising from the absence of a permanent director from 1996 to 1999 - which was around the time that it was facing the external and internal challenges – as well as adjusting to the differences in intellectual and academic grounding of the three directors who were at its helm.

One of the key issues that emerge in the analysis of the interviews is the multifarious understanding of the way in which the research undertaken by the CSHE was going to be utilised. The three notions of 'use' that we highlighted - which are also embedded in the objectives of the CSHE as set out in its constitution – are the following:

- Utilisation as input into the policymaking process
- Utilisation as contribution to scholarship
- Utilisation as generation of ideas, and particularly as a contribution to the debates on social reconstruction

Regarding the first understanding of 'use', our discussion highlighted the diminishing role that the CSHE played in the policymaking arena after 1999, a period which has been referred to as one of delivery or implementation. The overall assessment of the CSHE's research contribution to policymaking in this period – especially from the officials of the Department of Education - was not favourable. Notwithstanding this assessment, it was also apparent that there were different understandings of the relationship between research and policymaking among the officials themselves; from some, for example Essop, there emerged an instrumentalist view of the relationship between research and policymaking, whilst from others there was a somewhat more nuanced understanding of this relationship - indeed, even a recognition of the enlightenment function of research. With regard to the second understand of 'use', the evidence was generally unfavourable. It was shown that the CSHE has struggled to translate its research output into articles published in refereed journals.

As far as the third usage is concerned, our discussion showed that the CSHE's research - even in the context of a demand overload coupled with poor response capabilities (Clark, 1998) - managed to fulfil this notion of 'use', especially in the period where policy development was in its infancy, and was

dominated largely by debates at the level of ideas. In this regard, its contribution to the deliberations in NEPI and the NCHE was singularly significant. This was however not a straight-forward role for the CSHE to assume, for, even though it was aware of - and even advocated - the transformative potential of knowledge production in social reconstruction, it was ill-disposed to assuming a hand-maidenly relationship to the democratic movement, and was keen to maintain its intellectual independence.

A key limitation of this study has been its inability to delve into the details of the two projects that the CSHE undertook for the Department of Education. As it was mentioned in the chapter on research design, the current Director informed me that he will not be able to discuss the details of these projects, because of the strained relationship that continues to exist between the CSHE and the DoE, which is a consequence of some disagreements arising from these projects.

Finally, a key issue that this study did not address, and that requires further research, is whether the resolution of Terenzini's dilemma, and one which has been at the heart of the challenges facing the CSHE, is really the zero-sum game it's made out to be. The question that arises is the following: does the pursuit of higher education research as a scholarship of discovery *necessarily* have to be at the expense of its search (as an applied field) for solutions to the 'consequential problems' of higher education? In other words, is the dichotomy between intellectual and reconstructive work – between the development and consolidation of the intellectual/disciplinary foundations of higher education studies on the one hand, and a focus on the 'development/policy periphery', on the other hand - a false one?

If indeed this is the dilemma facing higher education policy research, it would be important to examine other areas of scholarly activity such as health and science policy and see how, and to what extent, policy research in these fields has managed to balance this tension. I would argue that it is premature to

pronounce the divide between reconstructive and intellectual scholarship as unbridgeable on the basis of the CSHE's experience. The case study of the CSHE is important insofar as it helps us come to grips with the intractability of this tension. What we have learnt in this study is the difficulty of trying to address these challenges *simultaneously*. The CSHE found itself in the unfortunate position of being torn between two imperatives that were not only (politically) exigent, but were equally urgent.

In the context of the declining availability of funding for scholarship of discovery - in its pure form, if there can be such a thing - research units like the CSHE have no choice but to undertake reconstructive work. Those that seem to have succeeded in holding these two imperatives in balance – for example the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) in the Netherlands – seem to have done so for two reasons: firstly, they operated under stable funding environments, having secured long-term support from their governments. Secondly, they had a core – albeit small - group of researchers who were beginning to establish themselves academically as the field itself was gaining prominence as an area of serious scholarship in Europe.

However, even in the context of the CHEPS experience, it seems that the need to balance the demands of intellectual and reconstructive work were not met concurrently, but came to be balanced *over time*. It also seems that – if one were forced to prioritise – then the primary requirement is to master the discipline of intellectual work before venturing into reconstructive work. It is almost impossible to do accomplish this balance the other way round, as it is difficult to develop the discipline of intellectual productivity once you are sucked into the cycle of dependency (for funding) that reconstructive work seems to inculcate. Alternatively - and that is, if you believe that it is the exception rather than the rule for any one person to be skilled in both scholarly endeavours – the solution is to be found in (research centres) having different people developing the expertise and capacity in these areas.

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Appendix 1A Questions for the CSHE

Background Information on the Centre

1. What are the goals and objectives of the Centre? How have these changed since its inception?
2. What is the staff complement of the Centre? What are the qualifications and research experience of staff?
3. What is the governance and management structure of the Centre?
4. What is the nature of the Centre's relationship to the University?
5. What is the university's contribution to the running of the Centre?

On the Research Programme of the Centre

1. How would you characterise the nature and type of research that is undertaken by the CSHE? Has this changed over the years?
2. Can you describe the research agenda and programme of the Centre? What are the constituent projects within each programme?
3. How are research projects of the Centre initiated?
4. What are the expected outcomes of the Centre's research programme?
5. How is the research programme of the Centre funded?

6. To what extent have the changes in the funding environment had an effect on:
 - a) the nature and type of the research the Centre is undertaking?
 - b) the orientation of its research programme and research agenda?
7. How is the Centre's research programme linked to the recent introduction of a post-graduate programme in higher education studies?

The document titled: "*The Research and Training Programme of the Education Policy Unit, UWC: September 1999 – August 2002*" states that:

After seven years of research and policy formation around higher education, it is crucial [for the CSHE] to reflect rigorously and critically on policy development around higher education – analysis of policy in contrast with research and analysis for policy

(1999: 15)

8. In relation to this statement:
 - a) Does it signify a change of orientation with respect to the research agenda or focus of the Centre?
 - b) How has the transition from undertaking research *for* policy to undertaking research or analysis *of* policy been accomplished?
9. To what extent has the Centre been involved in collaborative research with:
 - a) Academics within the host institution?
 - b) Academics/researchers from outside the Centre's institution?
 - c) Academics/researchers working in fields other than education?
 - d) Academics/researchers based outside the country?
 - e) Other centres (regionally/nationally/internationally)?

10. To what extent has the Centre been involved in research projects that have been linked to policy development processes?
11. Has the Centre been commissioned by the Department of Education to undertake projects that were directly linked to higher education policy development?
12. Has the Centre received commissions from independent agencies (statutory and non-statutory) on projects that were related to higher education policy development?

On the Utilisation of the Research

1. To what extent has the issue of utilisation been a feature of the research programme(s) of the CSHE?
2. Who have been the main beneficiaries of the output(s) of the Centre's research programme? Has this changed over the years? How?
3. What is the profile of the users of the Centre's research?
4. What is the nature of the relationship/ interaction between the Centre and the primary users of its research?
5. What strategies has the centre devised to facilitate the utilisation of its research?
6. What has facilitated or hindered the utilisation of your research by its intended beneficiaries? Can you link your response to some concrete project experiences?
7. Has the research produced by the Centre been used in unintended ways, or by unintended beneficiaries?

8. How has the Centre's research influenced, shaped or advanced understanding of higher education debates, or the policy discourse in the field?
9. What has facilitated or hindered the ability of the Centre to get its research products or output utilised in policy development?
10. How has the orientation of the Centre ("critical reconstructionists") facilitated or hindered its ability to contribute to the policymaking process?
11. How has the location of the Centre within a university – and within UWC in particular - facilitated or hindered its role in contributing to the policy development process?
12. Which of your projects has had the most impact on the policy development processes? What were the critical issues/lessons in this regard?

Appendix 1 B: Questions for the Department of Education

1. What was the involvement of the Department of Education (DoE) in the conceptualisation and design of the research project conducted by the Education Policy Unit at University of the Western Cape (UWC-EPU)?
2. What was to be the product of the research?
3. What did the DoE want to do with the product(s) of the research?
4. Did the DoE have any involvement in the research process itself?
5. What was the nature of the interaction with the researcher(s) during the course of the project?
6. How often was the interaction, about what, and at which stages of the research project?
7. How useful was the interaction with the research team?
8. Do you think you and the researcher(s) shared the same understanding of the research problem and how to approach solutions to the problem?
9. Did you have any problems with the research product(s)?

10. If you look back at the whole period of the research project, do you think that anything could have been done differently to better utilise the product, or to have a better link between the research and policymaking process?
11. What is the interaction currently between the DoE and the CSHE?
12. What have been the experiences of the DoE with regard to the utility of research produced to inform or assist in policymaking?
13. To what extent do you rely on research to guide your policy development initiatives?

Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

Ms Nasima Badsha	Deputy Director-General: Department of Education
Prof Saleem Badat	former Director: Education Policy Unit, University of the Western Cape
Prof Ian Bunting	Acting Director: Department of Education
Mr Ahmed Essop	Chief Director, Planning: Department of Education
Mr Glen Fisher	former Acting Director: Education Policy Unit, University of the Western Cape
Mr Chief Mabizela	former Researcher: Education Policy Unit, University of the Western Cape
Prof Joe Muller	member of Management Committee: Centre for the Study of Higher Education (formerly the Education Policy Unit), University of the Western Cape
Dr Molapo Qhobela	Chief Director, Constituency Affairs: Department of Education
Prof George Subotzky	Director: Centre for the Study of Higher Education (formerly the Education Policy Unit), University of the Western Cape